

EACH VOLUME SOLD SEPARATELY.

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 668.

ELEANOR'S VICTORY BY M. E. BRADDON
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 1.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

PARIS: C. REINWALD, 15, RUE DES SAINTS PÈRES.

502 This Collection
is published with copyright for Continental circulation, but all
purchasers are earnestly requested not to introduce the volumes
into England or into any British Colony.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

Each volume 1½ Thaler = 54 Xr. Rhen. = 2 Francs (1 s. 6 d.)

MISS AGUILAR: Home Influence 2 v.
The Mother's Recompense 2 v.

AÏDÉ: Rita 1 v. Carr of Carrlyon 2 v.

AINSWORTH: Windsor Castle 1 v.
St. James's 1 v. Jack Sheppard (w. portr.)
1 v. The Lancashire Witches 2 v. Star-
Chamber 2 v. The Flitch of Bacon 1 v.
Spendthrift 1 v. Mervyn Clitheroe 2 v.
Ovingdean Grange 1 v. The Constable
of the Tower 1 v. The Lord Mayor of
London 2 v.

"DOCTOR ANTONIO," AUTHOR OF:
Doctor Antonio 1 v. Lavinia 2 v. Lo-
renzo Benoni 1 v.

CURRIER BELL: Jane Eyre 2 v. Shir-
ley 2 v. Vilette 2 v. The Professor 1 v.

E. & A. BELL: Wuthering Heights
and Agnes Grey 2 v.

LADY BLESSINGTON: Meredith 1 v.
Strathern 2 v. Femme de Chambre 1 v.
Marmaduke Herbert 2 v. Country
Quarters (w. portr.) 2 v.

BRADDON: Lady Audley's Secret 2 v.
Aurora Floyd 2 v. Eleanor's Victory 2 v.

BROOKS: The Silver Cord 3 v.

BROWN: Rab and his Friends 1 v.

TOM BROWN'S School Days 1 v.

BULWER: Pelham (portr.) 1 v. Eugene
Aram 1 v. Paul Clifford 1 v. Zanoni 1 v.
Pompeii 1 v. The Disowned 1 v. Ernest
Maltravers 1 v. Alice 1 v. Eva and the
Pilgrims of the Rhine 1 v. Devereux 1 v.
Godolphin, Falkland 1 v. Rienzi 1 v.

Light and Morning 1 v. The last of the

rons 2 v. Athens 2 v. The Poems of

Shiller 1 v. Lucretia 2 v. Harold 2 v.

King Arthur 2 v. New Timon, St Ste-

phen's 1 v. The Caxtons 2 v. My Novel

1 v. What will he do with it? 4 v. Dra-

matic Works 2 v. A Strange Story 2 v.

BUNYAN: The Pilgrim's Progress.

MISS BURNEY: Evelina 1 v.

BURNS: Poetical Works (w. portr.) 1 v.

BYRON: Works (w. portr.) compl. 5 v.

T. CARLYLE: The French Revolution
3 v. Frederick the Great v. 1—7. Oliver
Cromwell 4 v.

THE LAST OF THE CAVALIERS 2 v.

S. T. COLERIDGE: The Poems 1 v.

W. COLLINS: After Dark 1 v. Hide
and Seek 2 v. A Plot in Private Life 1 v.
The Dead Secret 2 v. The Woman in
White 2 v. Basil 1 v. No Name 3 v.

COOPER: The Spy (w. portr.) 1 v. The
Two Admirals 1 v. Jack O'Lantern 1 v.

THE TWO COSMOS 1 v.

MISS CRAIK: Lost and Won 1 v.

MISS CUMMINS: Lamplighter 1 v.
Mabel Vaughan 1 v. El Fureidîs 1 v.

DICKENS: Pickwick Club (w. portr.) 2 v.
American Notes 1 v. Oliver Twist 1 v.

Nickleby 2 v. Sketches 1 v. Martin
Chuzzlewit 2 v. Christmas Carol; the

Chimes; the Cricket 1 v. Master Hum-
phrey's Clock 3 v. Pictures from Italy

1 v. Battle of Life; Haunted Man 1 v.
Dombey and Son 3 v. Copperfield 3 v.

Bleak House 4 v. A Child's History of
England (2 v. 8° 27 Ngr.). Hard Times 1 v.

Little Dorrit 4 v. Two Cities 2 v. Hunt-
ed Down; Traveller 1 v. Great Ex-

pectations 2 v. Christmas Stories 1 v.

B. DISRAELI: Coningsby 1 v. Sybil
1 v. Contarini Fleming (w. portr.) 1 v.

Alroy 1 v. Tancred 2 v. Venetia 2 v.
Vivian Grey 2 v. Henrietta Temple 1 v.

DIXON: Lord Bacon 1 v.

ELIOT: Scenes of Clerical Life 2 v.
Adam Bede 2 v. The Mill on the Floss

2 v. Silas Marner 1 v.

ESSAYS AND REVIEWS 1 v.

"PAUL FERROLL," AUTHOR OF: Paul
Ferroll 1 v. Year after Year 1 v. Why
Paul Ferroll killed his Wife 1 v.

FIELDING: Tom Jones 2 v.

FIVE CENTURIES of the English
Language and Literature, 1 v.

DE FOE: Robinson Crusoe 1 v.

LADY FULLERTON: Ellen Middleton 1 v.
Grantley Manor 2 v. Lady-Bird 2 v.

MRS. GASKELL: Mary Barton 1 v.
Ruth 2 v. North and South 1 v. Lizzie

Leigh 1 v. Life of Charlotte Brontë 2 v.
Lois the Witch 1 v. Sylvia's Lovers 2 v.

A Dark Night's Work 1 v.

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 668.

ELEANOR'S VICTORY BY M. E. BRADDON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

COLLECTION

BRITISH AUTHORS

VOL. 688

PRESENTED BY M. W. H. H. H.

IN THE YEAR

1871

v.
s

ELEANOR'S VICTORY.

BY

M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "AURORA FLOYD."

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

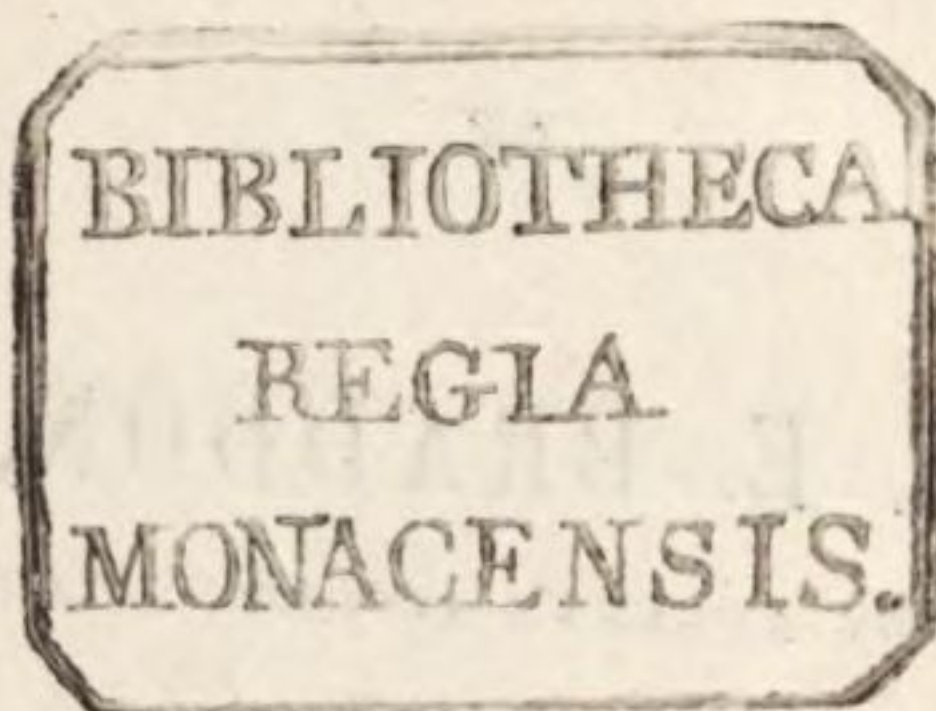
LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1863.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

ELFANOR'S VICTORY.



LIBRARY OF THE

ROYAL LIBRARY

OF THE

LIBRARY

OF THE

1881

LIBRARY OF THE

TO
EDMUND YATES, ESQ.,

THIS STORY IS DEDICATED,

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE FACT THAT HE WAS AMONG

THOSE EARLY FRIENDS WHOSE HEARTILY

EXPRESSED OPINION

GAVE ENCOURAGEMENT TO

THE AUTHOR.

EDWARD YATES, ESQ.

THE STORY OF THE

THE STORY OF THE

THE STORY OF THE

THE STORY OF THE

THE STORY OF THE

THE STORY OF THE

CONTENTS

O F V O L U M E I.

	Page
CHAPTER I. Going Home	1
— II. The Entresol in the Rue L'Archevêque	13
— III. The Story of the Past	29
— IV. Upon the Threshold of a Great Sorrow	47
— V. Waiting	67
— VI. The Black Building by the River	83
— VII. Suspense	93
— VIII. Good Samaritans	104
— IX. Looking to the future	124
— X. Hortensia Bannister holds out a Helping Hand	136
— XI. Richard Thornton's Promise	153
— XII. Gilbert Monckton	169
— XIII. Hazlewood	176
— XIV. The Prodigal's Return	192
— XV. Launcelot	202
— XVI. The Lawyer's Suspicion	213
— XVII. The Shadow on Gilbert Monckton's life	220
— XVIII. Unforgotten	225
— XIX. Like the Memory of a Dream	239
— XX. Recognition	253
— XXI. On the Track	261
— XXII. In the Shipbroker's Office	271
— XXIII. Resolved	285

	Page
CHAPTER XXIV. The One Chance.	291
— XXV. Accepted	307
— XXVI. An Insidious Demon	319
— XXVII. Slow Fires	328

ELEANOR'S VICTORY.

CHAPTER I.

Going Home.

THE craggy cliffs upon the Norman coast looked something like the terraced walls and turreted roofs of a ruined city in the hot afternoon sunshine, as the Empress steamer sped swiftly onward toward Dieppe. At least they looked thus in the eyes of a very young lady, who stood alone on the deck of the steam-packet, with yearning eyes fixed upon that foreign shore.

It was four o'clock upon a burning August afternoon in the year 1853. The steamer was fast approaching the harbour. Several moustachioed gentlemen, of various ages, costumes, and manners, were busy getting together carpet-bags, railway-rugs, camp-stools, newspapers, and umbrellas; preparatory to that eager rush towards the shore by which marine voyagers are apt to testify their contempt for Neptune, when they have no longer need of his service or fear of his vengeance. Two or three English families were collected in groups, holding guard over small mounds or barrows of luggage, having made all preparation for landing at first sight of the Norman shore dim in the distance; and of course about two hours too soon.

Several blooming young English damsels, gathered under maternal wings, were looking forward to sea-bathing in a foreign watering-place. The Etablissement des Bains had not yet been built, and Dieppe was not so popular, perhaps, among English pleasure-seekers as it now is. There were several comfortable-looking British families on board the steamer, but of all the friendly matrons and pretty daughters assembled on the deck, there seemed no one in any way connected with that lonely young lady who leant against the bulwark with a cloak across her arm and a rather shabby carpet-bag at her feet.

She was very young — indeed of that age which in the other sex is generally called the period of hobbledehoyhood. There was more ankle to be seen below the hem of her neat muslin frock than is quite consistent with elegance of attire in a young lady of fifteen; but as the ankle so revealed was rounded and slender, it would have been hypercritical to have objected to the shortness of the skirt, which had evidently been outgrown by its wearer.

Then, again, this lonely traveller was not only young but pretty. In spite of the shortness of her frock and the shabbiness of her straw bonnet, it was impossible for the most spiteful of the British misses to affirm the contrary. She was very pretty; so pretty that it was a pleasure to look at her, in her unconscious innocence, and to think how beautiful she would be by-and-bye, when that bright, budding, girlish loveliness bloomed out in its womanly splendour.

Her skin was fair but pale, — not a sentimental or sickly pallor, but a beautiful alabaster clearness of tint. Her eyes were grey, large, and dark, or rendered

dark by the shadow of long black lashes. I would rather not catalogue her other features too minutely; for though they were regular, and even beautiful, there is something low and material in all the other features as compared to the eyes. Her hair was of a soft golden brown, bright and rippling like a sunlit river. The brightness of that luxuriant hair, the light in her grey eyes, and the vivacity of a very beautiful smile, made her face seem almost luminous as she looked at you. It was difficult to imagine that she could ever look unhappy. She seemed an animated, radiant, and exuberant creature, who made an atmosphere of brightness and happiness about her. Other girls of her age would have crept to a corner of the deck, perhaps to hide their loneliness, or would have clung to the outer fringe of one of the family groups, making believe not to be alone; but this young lady had taken her stand boldly against the bulwark, choosing the position from which she might soonest hope to see Dieppe harbour, and apparently quite indifferent to observation, though many a furtive glance was cast towards the tall but girlish figure and the handsome profile so sharply defined against a blue background of summer sky.

But there was nothing unfeminine in all this; nothing bold or defiant; it was only the innocent unconsciousness of a light-hearted girl, ignorant of any perils which could assail her loneliness, and fearless in her ignorance. Throughout the brief sea-voyage she had displayed no symptoms of shyness or perplexity. She had suffered none of the tortures common to many travellers in their marine experiences. She had not been sea-sick; and indeed she did not look like a person who could be subject to any of the common ills

this weak flesh inherits. You could almost as easily have pictured to yourself the Goddess Hygeia suffering from a bilious headache, or Hebe laid up with the influenza, as this auburn-haired, grey-eyed young lady under any phase of mortal suffering. Eyes dim in the paroxysms of sea-sickness, had looked almost spitefully towards this happy, radiant creature, as she flitted hither and thither about the deck, courting the balmy ocean breezes that made themselves merry with her rippling hair. Lips, blue with suffering, had writhed as their owners beheld the sandwiches which this young schoolgirl devoured, the stale buns, the oval raspberry tarts, the hideous, bilious, revolting three-cornered puffs which she produced at different stages of the voyage from her shabby carpet-bag.

She had an odd volume of a novel, and a long, dreary desert of crochet-work, whose white-cotton monotony was only broken by occasional dingy oases bearing witness of the worker's dirty hands; they were such pretty hands, too, that it was a shame they should ever be dirty; and she had a bunch of flabby, faded flowers, sheltered by a great fan-like shield of newspaper; and she had a smelling-bottle, which she sniffed at perpetually, though she had no need of any such restorative, being as fresh and bright from first to last as the sea breezes themselves, and as little subject to any marine malady as the Lurleis whose waving locks could scarcely have been brighter than her own.

I think, if the feminine voyagers on board the Empress were cruel to this solitary young traveller in not making themselves friendly with her in her loneliness, the unkindness must be put down very much to that unchristian frame of mind in which people who

are sea-sick are apt to regard those who are not. This bouncing, bright-faced girl seemed to have little need of kindness from the miserable sufferers around her. So she was left to wander about the deck; now reading three pages of her novel; now doing half-a-dozen stitches of her work; now talking to the man at the wheel, in spite of all injunctions to the contrary; now making herself acquainted with stray pet dogs; always contented, always happy; and no one troubled himself about her.

It was only now, when they were nearing Dieppe, that one of the passengers, an elderly, grey-headed Englishman, spoke to her.

"You are very anxious to arrive," he said, smiling at her eager face.

"Oh, yes, very anxious, sir. We are nearly there, are we not?"

"Yes, we shall enter the harbour presently. You will have some one to meet you there, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," the young lady answered, lifting her arched brown eyebrows, "not at Dieppe. Papa will meet me at Paris; but he could never come all the way to Dieppe, just to take me back to Paris. He could never afford such an expense as that."

"No, to be sure; and you know no one at Dieppe?"

"Oh, no, I don't know any one in all France, except papa."

Her face, bright as it was even in repose, was lit up with a new brightness as she spoke of her father.

"You are very fond of your papa, I think," the Englishman said.

"Oh, yes, I love him very much. I have not seen him for more than a year. The journey costs so much

between England and France, and I have been at school near London, at Brixton; I dare say you know Brixton; but I am going to France now, for good."

"Indeed! You seem very young to leave school."

"But I'm not going to leave school," the young lady answered, eagerly. "I am going to a very expensive school in Paris, to finish my education; and then —"

She paused here, hesitating and blushing a little.

"And then what?"

"I am going to be a governess. Papa is not rich. He has no fortune now."

"He has had a fortune, then?"

"He has had three."

The young lady's grey eyes were lit up with a certain look of triumph as she said this.

"He has been very extravagant, poor dear," she continued, apologetically; "and he has spent three fortunes, altogether. But he has been always so courted and admired, you know, that it is not to be wondered at. He knew the Prince Regent, and Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Brummel, and the Duke of York, and — oh, all sorts of people, ever so intimately; and he was a member of the Beefsteak Club, and wore a silver grid-iron in his button-hole, and he is the most delightful man in society, even now, though he is very old."

"Very old! And you are so young."

The Englishman looked almost incredulously at his animated companion.

"Yes, I am papa's youngest child. He has been married twice. I have no real brothers and sisters. I have only half-brothers and sisters, who don't really and truly care for me, you know. How should they?"

They were grown up when I was born, and I have scarcely ever seen them. I have only papa in all the world."

"You have no mother, then?"

"No; mamma died when I was three years old."

The "Empress" packet was entering the harbour by this time. The grey-headed Englishman went away to look after his portmanteaus and hat-boxes, but he returned presently to the fair-haired school-girl.

"Will you let me help you with your luggage," he said. "I will go and look after it if you will tell me for what to inquire."

"You are very kind. I have only one box. It is directed to Miss Vane, Paris."

"Very well, Miss Vane, I will go and find your box. Stay," he said, taking out his card-case, "this is my name, and if you will permit me, I will see you safely to Paris."

"Thank you, sir. You are very kind."

The young lady accepted her new friend's service as frankly as it was offered. He had grey hair, and in that one particular at least resembled her father. That was almost enough to make her like him.

There was the usual confusion and delay at the Custom-house — a little squabbling and a good deal of bribery; but everything was managed, upon the whole, pretty comfortably. Most of the passengers dropped in at the Hotel de l'Europe, or some of the other hotels upon the stony quay; a few hurried off to the market-place, to stare at the cathedral church of Saint Jacques, or the great statue of Abraham Duquesne, the rugged sea-king, with broad-brimmed hat and waving plumes, high boots and flowing hair, and to

buy peaches and apricots of the noisy market women. Others wandered in the slimy and slippery fish-market, fearfully and wonderingly contemplative of those hideous conger-eels, dog-fish, and other piscatorial monstrosities which seem peculiar to Dieppe. Miss Vane and her companion strolled into the dusky church of Saint Jacques by a little wooden door in a shady nook of the edifice. A few solitary women were kneeling here and there, half-hidden behind their high-backed rush chairs. A fisherman was praying upon the steps of a little chapel, in the solemn obscurity.

"I have never been here before," Miss Vane whispered. "I came by Dover and Calais, the last time; but this way is so much cheaper, and I almost think it nicer, for the journey's so short from London to Newhaven, and I don't mind the long sea voyage a bit. Thank you for bringing me to see this cathedral."

Half-an-hour after this the two travellers were seated in a first-class carriage, with other railway passengers, French and English, hurrying through the fair Norman landscape.

Miss Vane looked out at the bright hills and woods, the fruitful orchards, and white-roofed cottages, so villa-like, fantastical, and beautiful; and her face brightened with the brightening of the landscape under the hot radiance of the sun. The grey-headed gentleman felt a quiet pleasure in watching that earnest, hopeful, candid face; the grey eyes, illumined with gladness; the parted lips, almost tremulous with delight, as the sunny panorama glided by the open window.

The quiet old bachelor's heart had been won by his companion's frank acceptance of his simple service.

"Another girl of her age would have been as frightened of a masculine stranger as of a wild beast," he thought, "and would have given herself all manner of missish airs; but this young damsel smiles in my face, and trusts me with almost infantile simplicity. I hope her father is a good man. I don't much like that talk of Sheridan and Beau Brummel and the Beefsteak Club. No very good school for fathers, that, I should fancy. I wish her mother had been alive, poor child. I hope she is going to a happy home, and a happy future."

The train stopped at Rouen, and Miss Vane accepted a cup of coffee and some *brioche*s from her companion. The red August sunset was melting into grey mistiness by this time, and the first shimmer of the moonlight was silvery on the water as they crossed the Seine and left the lighted city behind them. The grey-headed Englishman fell asleep soon after this, and before long there was a low chorus of snoring, masculine and feminine, audible in the comfortable carriage; only broken now and then, when the train stopped with a jerk at some fantastic village that looked like a collection of Swiss toy cottages in the dim summer night.

But, let these matter-of-fact people snore and slumber as they might, there was no such thing as sleep for Eleanor Vane. It would have been utter sacrilege to have slept in the face of all that moonlighted beauty, to have been carried sleeping through that fairy landscape. The eager school-girl's watchful eyes drank in the loveliness of every hill and valley; the low scattered woodland; the watering streams; and that perplexing Seine, which the rumbling carriage

crossed so often with a dismal hollow sound in the stillness of the night.

No; Miss Vane's bright grey eyes were not closed once in that evening journey; and at last, when the train entered the great Parisian station, when all the trouble and confusion of arrival began — that wearisome encounter of difficulty which makes cowardly travellers wish the longest journey longer than it is — the young lady's head was thrust out of the window, and her eager eyes wandered hither and thither amongst the faces of the crowd.

Yes, he was there — her father. That white-haired old man, with the gold-headed cane, and the aristocratic appearance. She pointed him out eagerly to her fellow-passenger.

"That is papa — you see, — the handsome man. He is coming this way, but he doesn't see us. Oh, let me out, please; let me go to him!"

She trembled in her eagerness, and her fair face flushed crimson with excitement. She forgot her carpet-bag, her novel, her crochet, her smelling-bottle, her cloak, her parasol — all her paraphernalia: and left her companion to collect them as best he might. She was out of the carriage and in her father's arms she scarcely knew how. The platform seemed deserted all in a moment, for the passengers had rushed away to a great dreary *salle d'attente*, there to await the inspection of their luggage. Miss Vane, her fellow-traveller, and her father were almost alone, and she was looking up at the old man's face in the lamplight.

"Papa, dear, papa, darling, how well you are looking; as well as ever; better than ever, I think!"

Her father drew himself up proudly. He was past

seventy years of age, but he was a very handsome man. His beauty was of that patrician type which loses little by age. He was tall and broad-chested, erect as a Grenadier, but not fat. The Prince Regent might become corpulent, and lay himself open to the insolent sneers of his sometime boon companion and friend; but Mr. George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane held himself on his guard against that insidious foe which steals away the graces of so many elderly gentlemen. Mr. Vane's aristocratic bearing imparted such a stamp to his clothes, that it was not easy to see the shabbiness of his garments; but those garments were shabby. Carefully as they had been brushed, they bore the traces of that slow decay which is not to be entirely concealed, whatever the art of the wearer.

Miss Vane's travelling companion saw all this. He had been so much interested by the young lady's frank and fearless manner, that he would fain have lingered in the hope of learning something of her father's character; but he felt that he had no excuse for delaying his departure.

"I will wish you good night, now, Miss Vane," he said, kindly, "since you are safely restored to your papa."

Mr. Vane lifted his grey eyebrows, looked at his daughter interrogatively; rather suspiciously, the traveller thought.

"Oh, papa, dear," the young lady answered, in reply to that questioning look, "this gentleman was on board the boat with me, and he has been so very kind."

She searched in her pocket for the card which her acquaintance had given her, and produced that document, rather limp and crumpled. Her father looked at it, murmured the name inscribed upon it twice or

thrice, as if trying to attach some aristocratic association thereto, but evidently failed in doing so.

"I have not the honour of — a — haw — knowing this name, sir," he said, lifting his hat stiffly about half a yard from his silvered head; "but for your courtesy and kindness to my child, I hope you will accept my best thanks. I was prevented by important business of — a — haw — not altogether undiplomatic character — from crossing the Channel to fetch my daughter; and — aw — also — prevented from sending my servant — by — aw — I thank you for your politeness, sir. You are a stranger, by the way. Can I do anything for you in Paris? Lord Cowley is my very old friend; any service that I can render you in that quarter — I —"

The traveller bowed and smiled.

"Thank you very much," he said, "I am no stranger in Paris. I will wish you good night; good night, Miss Vane."

But Mr. Vane was not going to let his daughter's friend off so easily. He produced his card-case, murmured more pompous assurances of his gratitude, and tendered further offers of patronage to the quiet traveller, who found something rather oppressive in Mr. Vane's civility. But it was all over at last, and the old man led his daughter off to look for the trunk which contained all her worldly possessions.

The stranger looked wistfully after the father and child.

"I hope she may have a happy future," he thought, rather despondingly; "the old man is poor and pompous. He tells lies which bring hot blushes into his daughter's beautiful face. I am very sorry for her."

CHAPTER II.

The Entresol in the Rue L'Archevêque.

MR. VANE took his daughter away from the station in one of those secondary and cheaper vehicles which are distinguished by the discriminating Parisian by some mysterious difference of badge. The close, stifling carriage rattled over the uneven stones of long streets which were unfamiliar to Eleanor Vane, until it emerged into the full glory of the lighted Boulevard. The light-hearted school-girl could not suppress a cry of rapture as she looked once more at the broad thoroughfare, the dazzling lamps, the crowd, the theatres, the cafés, the beauty and splendour, although she had spent her summer holiday in Paris only a year before.

"It seems so beautiful again, papa," she said, "just as if I'd never seen it before; and I'm to stop here now, and never, never to leave you again, to go away for such a cruel distance. You don't know how unhappy I've been, sometimes, papa dear. I wouldn't tell you then, for fear of making you uneasy; but I can tell you now, now that it's all over."

"Unhappy!" gasped the old man, clenching his fist, "they've not been unkind to you — they've not dared —"

"Oh, no, dearest father. They've been very, very good. I was quite a favourite, papa. Yes, though there were so many rich girls in the school, and I was only a half-boarder, I was quite a favourite with Miss Bennett and Miss Sophia; though I know I was care-

less and lazy sometimes, not on purpose, you know, papa, for I tried hard to get on with my education, for your sake, darling. No, everybody was very kind to me, papa; but I used to think sometimes how far I was from you; what miles and miles and miles of sea and land there were between us, and that if you should be ill — I —”

Eleanor Vane broke down, and her father clasped her in his arms, and cried over her silently. The tears came with very little provocation to the old man's handsome blue eyes. He was of that sanguine temperament which to the last preserves the fondest delusions of youth. At seventy-five years of age he hoped and dreamed and deluded himself as foolishly as he had done at seventeen. His sanguine temperament had been for ever leading him astray for more than sixty years. Severe judges called George Vane a liar; but perhaps his shallow romances, his pitiful boasts, were more often highly-coloured and poetical versions of the truth, than actual falsehood.

It was past twelve o'clock when the carriage drove away from the lights and splendour into the darkness of a labyrinth of quiet streets behind the Madeleine. The Rue l'Archevêque was one of these dingy and quiet streets, very narrow, very close and stifling in the hot August midnight. The vehicle stopped abruptly at a corner, before a little shop, the shutters of which were closed, of course, at this hour.

“It is a butcher's shop, I am sorry to say, my love,” Mr. Vane said, apologetically, as he handed his daughter on to the pavement; “but I find myself very comfortable here, and it is conveniently adjacent to the Boulevards.”

The old man paid the driver, who had deposited mademoiselle's box upon the threshold of the little door beside the butcher's shop. The *pour-boire* was not a very large one, but Mr. Vane bestowed it with the air of a prince. He pushed open the low door, and took his daughter into a narrow passage. There was no porter or portress, for the butcher's shop and the apartments belonging to it were abnormal altogether; but there was a candle and box of matches on a shelf in a corner of the steep corkscrew staircase. The driver carried Eleanor's box as far as the entresol in consideration of his *pour-boire*, but departed while Mr. Vane was opening the door of an apartment facing the staircase.

The entresol consisted of three little rooms, opening one out of another, and so small and low that Miss Vane almost fancied herself in a doll's house. Every article of furniture in the stifling little apartment bore the impress of its nationality. Tawdry curtains of figured damask, resplendent with dirty tulips and monster roses, tarnished ormolu mouldings, a gilded clock with a cracked dial and a broken shade, a pair of rickety bronze candlesticks, a couple of uncompromising chairs covered with dusty green velvet and relieved by brass-headed nails, and a square table with a long trailing cover of the same material as the curtains, completed the adornments of the sitting-room. The bed-chambers were smaller, closer, and hotter. Voluminous worsted curtains falling before the narrow windows, and smothering the little beds, made the stifling atmosphere yet more stifling. The low ceilings seemed to rest on the top of poor Eleanor's head. She had been accustomed to large airy rooms, and broad uncurtained open windows.

"How hot it is here, papa," she said, drawing a long breath.

"It always is hot in Paris at this time of year, my dear," Mr. Vane answered; "the rooms are small you see, but convenient. That is to be your bed-room, my love," he added, indicating one of the little chambers.

He was evidently habituated to Parisian lodging-houses, and saw no discomfort in the tawdry grandeur, the shabby splendour, the pitiful attempt to substitute scraps of gilding and patches of velvet for the common necessities and decencies of life.

"And now let me look at you, my dear; let me look at you, Eleanor."

George Mowbray Vane set the candlestick upon the rusty velvet cover of the low mantelpiece, and drew his daughter towards him. She had thrown off her bonnet and loose grey cloak, and stood before her father in her scanty muslin frock with all her auburn hair hanging about her face and shoulders, and glittering in the dim light of that one scrap of wax candle.

"My pet, how beautiful you have grown, how beautiful!" the old man said, with an accent of fond tenderness. "We'll teach Mrs. Bannister a lesson some of these days, Eleanor. Yes, *our* turn will come, my love; I know that I shall die a rich man."

Miss Vane was accustomed to hear this remark from her father. She inherited something of his sanguine nature, and she loved him very dearly, so she may be forgiven if she believed in his vague visions of future grandeur. She had never seen anything in her life but chaotic wrecks of departed splendour, confusion, debt, and difficulty. She had not been called upon to face poverty in the fair hand-to-hand struggle

which ennobles and elevates the sturdy wrestler in the battle of life. No, she had rather been compelled to play at hide-and-seek with the grim enemy. She had never gone out into the open, and looked her foe full in the eyes, hardy, resolute, patient, and steadfast. She was familiar with all those debasing tricks and pitiful subterfuges whereby the weak and faint-hearted seek to circumvent the enemy; but she had never been taught the use of those measures by which he may be honestly beaten.

The Mrs. Bannister of whom George Vane had spoken, was one of his elder daughters, who had been very, very ungrateful to him, he declared; and who now in his old age doled him out the meagre allowance which enabled him to occupy an entresol over a butcher's shop, and dine daily at one of the cheap restaurants in the Palais Royal.

Mr. Vane was wont to lament his daughter's cruel lack of affection in very bitter language, freely interspersed with quotations from "King Lear;" indeed I believe he considered his case entirely parallel with that of the injured British monarch and father; ignoring the one rather important fact that, whereas Lear's folly had been the too generous division of his own fortune between his recreant daughters, *his* weakness had been the reckless waste and expenditure of the portions which his children had inherited from their mother.

Mrs. Bannister, instigated thereto by her husband, had protested some years before against the several acts of folly and extravagance by which the fortune which ought to have been hers had been fooled away. She declined to allow her father more than the pit-

tance alluded to above; although, as she was now a rich widow, and of course entirely her own mistress, she might have done much more.

"Yes, my darling," Mr. Vane said, as he proudly contemplated his youngest child's beauty, "we will turn the tables upon Mrs. Bannister and the rest of them, yet, please God. My Benjamin; my youngest, brightest darling; we'll teach them a lesson. They may poke their old father away in a foreign lodging, and stint him of money for any little innocent pleasure; but the day will come, my love, the day will come!"

The old man nodded his head two or three times with solemn significance. The sanguine, impulsive nature, dwarfed and fettered by the cruel bonds of poverty, was too elastic to be entirely repressed even by those galling chains; and having hoped all his life, and having enjoyed such successes and good fortune as fall to the lot of very few men, he went on hoping in his old age, blindly confident that some sudden revolution in the wheel of life would lift him out of his obscurity and set him again on the pinnacle he had once occupied so proudly.

He had had a host of friends and many children, and he had squandered more than one fortune, not being any more careful of other people's money than of his own; and now, in his poverty and desolation, the child of his old age was the only one who clung to him and loved him and believed in him; the only one whom he loved, perhaps, truly and unreservedly, though he wept frequently over the ingratitude of the others. It may be that Eleanor was the only one whom he could love with any comfort to himself, because the only one he had never injured.

"But, papa, dear," this youngest and best loved of the old man's children pleaded gently, "Mrs. Bannister, Hortensia, has been very good — has she not? — in sending the money for my education at Madame Marly's, where she was finished herself. That was very generous of her, wasn't it, papa?"

Mr. Vane shook his head, and lifted his grey eyebrows with a deprecating expression.

"Hortensia Bannister cannot perform a generous act in a generous manner, my dear. You recognise the viper by the reptile's sting: you may recognise Hortensia in pretty much the same manner. She gives, but she insults the recipients of her — ahem — bounty. Shall I read you her letter, Eleanor?"

"If you please, dear papa."

The young lady had seated herself, in a somewhat hoydenish manner, upon the elbow of her father's chair, and had wound her soft round arm about his neck. She loved him and believed in him. The world which had courted and admired him while he had money and could boast such acquaintance as the Prince and Sheridan, Sir Francis Burdett, Lord Castlereagh, Mr. Pitt, and the Duke of York, had fallen away from him of late; and the few old associates who yet remained of that dead-and-gone cycle were apt to avoid him, influenced perhaps by the recollection of small loans of an occasional five-pound note, and "a little silver," which had not been repaid. Yes, the world had fallen away from George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane, once of Vandeleur Park, Cheshire, and Mowbray Castle, near York. The tradesmen who had helped him to squander his money had let him get very deep in their books before they closed those cruel

ledgers, and stopped all supplies. He had existed for a long time — he had lived as a gentleman, he said himself — upon the traditions of the past, the airy memories of the fortunes he had wasted. But this was all over now, and he had emigrated to the city in which he had played the Grand Seigneur in those glorious early days of the Restoration, and where he was compelled to lead a low and vulgar life, disgracing himself by pettifogging ready-money dealings, utterly degrading to a gentleman.

He could not bring himself to own that he was better and happier in this new life, and that it was pleasant to be able to walk erect and defiant upon the Boulevards, rather than to be compelled to plunge down dark alleys, and dive into sinuous byways, for the avoidance of importunate creditors, as he had been in free England.

He took his wealthy daughter's letter from the breast-pocket of his coat; a fashionable coat though shabby now, for it had been made for him by a sentimental German tailor, who had wept over his late patron's altered fortunes, and given him credit for a suit of clothes. That compassionate German tailor never expected to be paid; and the clothes were a benefaction, a gift as purely and generously given as any Christian dole offered in the holy name of charity; but Mr. Vane was pleased with the fiction of an expected payment, and would have revolted against the idea of receiving a present from the good-natured tradesman.

The letter from Hortensia Bannister was not a long one. It was written in sharp and decisive paragraphs, and in a neat, firm hand. Rather a cruel-looking hand, Eleanor Vane thought.

The old man put a double gold eyeglass over his nose, and began to read.

Hyde Park Gardens, August 1853.

"MY DEAR FATHER, — In compliance with your repeated solicitations I have determined upon taking measures by which I hope the future welfare of your youngest daughter may be secured.

"I must, however, remind you that Eleanor Vane and I are the children of different mothers; that she has, therefore, less claim upon me than a sister usually has; and I freely confess I never heard of one sister being called upon to provide for another.

"You must also remember that I never entertained any degree of friendship or affection for Eleanor's mother, who was much below you in station, and whom you married in direct opposition to myself and my sisters —"

Eleanor started; she was too impetuous to listen quite passively to this letter. Her father felt the sudden movement of the arm about his neck.

"Your mother was an angel, my dear," he said; "and this woman is — never mind what. My daughters chose to give themselves airs to your poor mother because she had been their governess, and because her father had failed as a sugar-broker."

He went back to the letter, groping nervously for the place at which he had left off, with the point of his well-shaped finger —

"But you tell me that you have no power to make any provision whatsoever for your daughter; and that unless I assist you, this unhappy girl may, in the event of your death, be flung penniless upon the world, im-

perfectly educated, and totally incompetent to get her living."

"She speaks of my death very freely," the old man murmured, "but she's right enough. I shan't trouble anybody long, my dear; I shan't trouble anybody long."

The tender arms wound themselves more closely about George Vane's neck.

"Papa, darling," the soft voice whispered, "you have never troubled *me*. Don't go on with that horrid letter, papa. We won't accept any favours from such a woman."

"Yes, yes, my love, for your sake; if I stoop, it is for your sake, Eleanor."

The old man went on reading.

"Under these circumstances," the writer continued, "I have come to the following determination. I will give you a hundred pounds, to be paid to Madame Marly, who knows you, and has received a great deal of money from you for my education and that of my sisters, and who will, therefore, be inclined to receive Eleanor upon advantageous terms. For this sum of money Madame Marly will, I feel assured, consent to prepare my half-sister for the situation of governess in a gentleman's family; that is, of course, premising that Eleanor has availed herself conscientiously of the advantages afforded her by her residence with the Misses Bennett.

"I shall write to Madame Marly by this post, using my best influence with her for Eleanor's benefit; and, should I receive a favourable reply to this letter, I will immediately send you an order for a hundred pounds, to be paid by you to Madame Marly.

"I do this in order that you may not appear to my old instructress — who remembers you as a rich man — in the position of a pauper; but in thus attempting to spare your feelings, and perhaps my own, I fear that I run some risk.

"Let me therefore warn you that this money is the last I will ever pay for my half-sister's benefit. Squander or misuse it if you please. You have robbed me often, and would not perhaps hesitate to do so again. But bear in mind, that this time it is Eleanor you will rob and not me.

"The only chance she will have of completing her education is the chance I now give her. Rob her of this and you rob her of an honourable future. Deprive her of this and you make yourself answerable for any misfortunes which may befall her when you are dead and gone.

"Forgive me if I have spoken harshly, or even undutifully; my excuse lies in your past follies. I have spoken strongly because I wished to make a strong impression, and I believe that I have acted for the best.

"Once for all, remember that I will attend to no future solicitations on Eleanor's behalf. If she makes good use of the help I now afford her, I may perhaps be tempted to render her further services — unsolicited — in the future. If she or you make a bad use of this one chance, I wash my hands of all concern in your future miseries.

"The money will be made payable at Messrs. Blount's, Rue de la Paix.

"I trust you attend the Protestant Church in the Rue Rivoli.

"With best wishes for your welfare, temporal and eternal,

"I remain, my dear father,

"Your affectionate daughter,

"HORTENSIA BANNISTER."

George Vane burst into tears as he finished the letter. How cruelly she had stabbed him, this honourable, conscientious daughter, whom he had robbed certainly, but in a generous, magnanimous, reckless fashion, that made robbery rather a princely virtue than a sordid vice. How cruelly the old heart was lacerated by that bitter letter!

"As if I would touch the money," cried Mr. Vane, elevating his trembling hands to the low ceiling with a passionate and tragic gesture. "Have I been such a wretch to you, Eleanor, that this woman should accuse me of wishing to snatch the bread from your innocent lips?"

"Papa, papa!"

"Have I been such an unnatural father, such a traitor, liar, swindler, and cheat, that my own daughter should say these things to me?"

His voice rose higher with each sentence, and the tears streamed down his wrinkled cheeks.

Eleanor tried to kiss away those tears; but he pushed her from him with passionate vehemence.

"Go away from me, my child, I am a wretch, a robber, a scoundrel, a ——"

"No, no, no, papa," cried Eleanor, "you are all that is good, you have always been good to me, dear, dear papa."

"By what right then does this woman insult me with such a letter as that?" asked the old man, drying

his eyes, and pointing to the crumpled letter which he had flung upon the ground.

"She has no right, papa," answered Eleanor. "She is a wicked, cruel woman. But we'll send back her money. I'd rather go out into the world at once, papa, and work for you: I'd rather be a dressmaker. I could learn soon if I tried very hard. I do know a little about dressmaking. I made this dress, and it fits very well, only I cut out both the backs for one side, and both sleeves for one arm, and that wasted the stuff you know, and made the skirt a little scanty. I'd rather do anything, papa, than accept this money, — I would indeed. I don't want to go to this grand Parisian school, except to be near you, papa, darling. That was the only thing I ever cared for. The Miss Bennetts would take me as a pupil teacher, and give me fifteen pounds a-year, and I'd send every shilling of it to you, papa, and then you needn't live over a wretched shop where the meat smells nasty in the warm weather. We won't take the money, will we, papa?"

The old man shook his head, and made a motion with his lips and throat, as if he had been gulping down some bitter draught.

"Yes, my dear," he said, in a tone of ineffable resignation, "for your sake I would suffer many humiliations; for your sake I will endure this. We will take no notice of this woman's letter; though I could write her a reply that — but no matter. We will let her insolence pass, and she shall never know how keenly it has stung me here!"

He tapped his breast as he spoke, and the tears rose again to his eyes.

"We will accept this money, Eleanor," he continued, "we will accept her bounty; and the day may come when you will have ample power to retaliate — ample power, my dear. She has called me a thief, Eleanor," exclaimed the old man, suddenly returning to his own wrongs, — "a thief! My own daughter has called me a thief, and accused me of the baseness of robbing you."

"Papa, papa, darling!"

"As if your father could rob you of this money, Eleanor; as if I could touch a penny of it. No, so help me Heaven! not a penny of it to save me from starving."

His head sank forward upon his breast, and he sat for some minutes muttering to himself in broken sentences, as if almost unconscious of his daughter's presence. In that time he looked older than he had looked at any moment since his daughter had met him at the station. Looking at him now, wistfully and sorrowfully, Eleanor Vane saw that her father was indeed an old man, vacillating and weak of purpose, and with ample need of all the compassionate tenderness, the fond affection, which overflowed her girlish heart as she looked at him. She knelt down on the slippery oaken floor at his feet, and took his tremulous hand in both of hers.

He started as she touched him, and looked at her.

"My darling," he cried, "you've had nothing to eat; you've been nearly an hour in the house, and you've had nothing to eat. But I've not forgotten you, Nell; you'll find I've not forgotten you."

He rose from his chair, and went over to a little cupboard in the wall, from which he took a couple of plates and tumblers, some knives and forks, and two

or three parcels wrapped in white paper, and neatly tied with narrow red tape. He put these on the table, and going a second time to the cupboard produced a pint bottle of Burgundy, in a basket; very dusty and cobwebby; and therefore, no doubt, very choice.

The white paper parcels contained very *recherché* comestibles. A slender wedge of truffled turkey, some semi-transparent slices of German sausage, and an open plum tart, with a great deal of rich ruby coloured syrup, and an utterly uneatable crust.

Miss Vane partook very freely of this little collation, praising her father for his goodness and indulgence as she ate the simple feast he had prepared for her. But she did not like the Burgundy in the dusty basket, and preferred to drink some water out of one of the toilette bottles.

Her father, however, enjoyed the pint of good wine, and recovered his equanimity under its generous influence. He had never been a drunkard; he had indeed one of those excitable natures which cannot endure the influence of strong drinks, and a very little wine had considerable effect upon him.

He talked a good deal, therefore, to his daughter, told her some of his delusive hopes in the future, tried to explain some of the plans which he had formed for his and her advancement, and was altogether very happy and social. The look of age, which had been so strong upon him half an hour before, faded out like a gray morning shadow under the broadening sunlight. He was a young man again; proud, hopeful, reckless; handsome; ready to run through three more fortunes, if they should fall to his lot.

It was past two o'clock when Eleanor Vane lay down, thoroughly exhausted, but not weary — she had one of those natures which seem never to grow weary — to fall asleep for the first time in four-and-twenty hours.

Her father did not quite so quickly fall into a peaceful slumber. He lay awake for upwards of an hour, tumbling and tossing to and fro upon the narrow spring mattress, and muttering to himself.

And even in his sleep, though the early summer dawn was gray in the room when he fell into a fitful and broken slumber, the trouble of his eldest daughter's letter was heavy upon him, for every now and then he muttered, disjointedly, —

“Thief — swindler! As if — as if — I would — rob — my own daughter.”

CHAPTER III.

The Story of the Past.

THE history of George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane was the history of many men whose lot was to shine in that brilliant orbit, of which George, Prince Regent, was the ruling star. Around that dazzling royal planet how many smaller lights revolved, twinkling in humble emulation of their prince's glory. What were fortune, friends, children, wives or creditors, when weighed in the balance, if the royal favour, the princely smile hung on the other side of the scale? If George the Fourth was pleased to bring ruin upon himself and his creditors, how should his friends and associates do less? Looking backward at the spurious glitter, the mock splendour, the hollow delight of that wonderful age which is so near us in point of time, so far away from us by reason of the wide differences which divide to-day from that foolish yesterday, we can of course afford to be very wise, and can clearly see what a very witches' sabbath was that long revelry in which the fourth George of England led the dance. But who shall doubt that the dancers themselves saw the fantastic caperings of their leader in a very different light, and looked upon their model as worthy of all mortal praise and imitation.

The men of that frivolous era seem to have abandoned themselves to unmanly weakness, and followed the fashions set them by the fat and pale-faced Royal Adonis, as blindly as the women of to-day

emulate the Imperial caprices of the Tuileries, sacrificing themselves as burnt offerings to the Moloch of fashion, in obedience to the laws made by a lady who lives in a palace; and who, when she wears her silken robe three yards in length and six in circumference, can scarcely be expected to foresee the nervous tortures by-and-bye to be endured by Mr. John Smith, of Peckham Rye, whose wife will insist on having a hoop and train *à l'Oojénée*, and sweeping her superabundant skirts into the fender and across the back of the grate every time she steers her difficult way about the worthy Smith's fourteen feet by twelve front parlour.

Yes, if Cleopatra melts pearls in her wine, and sails in a galley of gold, we must have sham jewels to dissolve in our inferior vintages, and sham gold to adorn our galleys. If Pericles, or Charles, or George, affects splendour and ruin, the prince's devoted subjects must ruin themselves also, never letting their master see anything but smiling faces amid the general wreck, and utterly heedless of such minor considerations as wives and children, creditors and friends.

George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane ruined himself with a grace that was only second to that of his royal model. He began life with a fair estate left him by his father, and having contrived to squander the best part of his patrimony within a few years of his coming of age, was so lucky as to marry the only daughter and heiress of a rich banker, thereby acquiring a second fortune just at that critical moment when the first was on the verge of exhaustion. He was not a bad husband to the simple girl who loved and worshipped him with a foolishly confiding worship. It was not in his nature to be wilfully bad to anybody; for

he was of a genial, generous spirit, with warm affections for those who pleased him and ministered to his happiness. He introduced his young wife to very brilliant people, and led her into sacred and inner circles, whither her father the banker could never have taken her; but he squandered her money foolishly and recklessly. He broke down the bulwarks of parchment with which the lawyers had hoped to protect her fortune. He made light of the settlements which were to provide for the future of his children. They were only blooming and beautiful young creatures in cambric frocks and blue sashes; and surely, Mr. Vane urged, they had nothing to complain of, for hadn't they splendid apartments and costly dresses, nurses, governesses, masters, carriages, ponies, and indulgences of every kind? What did they want, then, or in what manner did he fail in his duty towards those innocent darlings? Had not his Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent himself, come to Vandeleur to stand sponsor for Edward George? Had not Hortensia Georgina received her second name after the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire, in whose lovely arms she had been dandled when only a fortnight old.

Were there any earthly honours or splendours, within the limit of reasonable desire, which George Vane had failed to procure for his wife and children?

The gentle lady was fain to answer this question in the negative, and to accept it for what it was not; namely an answer to the questions *she* had ventured to ask touching the future of those unconscious children. Mr. Vane could always persuade his simple wife to sign away any of those parchment defences the lawyers had devised for her protection; and when,

after an elegant little *tête-à-tête* dinner, in the arrangement of which the *chef* had displayed his most consummate skill, the affectionate husband produced a diamond bracelet, or an emerald heart from its morocco casket, and clasped the jewel upon his wife's slender arm, or hung it round her delicate throat, with the tears glistening in his handsome blue eyes, gentle Margaret Vane forgot the sacrifices of the morning, and all those shadowy doubts which were wont to torment her when she contemplated the future.

Then, again, Mr. Vane had an unfailing excuse for present imprudence in the expectation of a third fortune, which was to come to him from his bachelor uncle and godfather, Sir Millwood Mowbray, of Mowbray Castle, York; so there were no vulgar retrenchments either at Vandeleur Park or in Berkeley Square, and when Sir Milwood's fortune did come, in the due course of life and death, to his nephew's hands, it only came just in time to stave off the ruin that threatened George Vane's household.

If Mr. Vane had then taken his wife's advice, all might have been well; but the Mowbray fortune seemed like the two other fortunes, quite inexhaustible, the sanguine gentleman forgetting that he was in debt to full half its amount. The French *chef* still prepared dinners which might have made Oude himself tremble for his laurels; the German governess and the Parisian lady's-maids still attended upon Mr. Vane's daughters; the old career of extravagance went on. George Vane carried his family to the continent, and plunged them into new gaieties at the court of the restored Louis. He sent his daughters to the most expensive finishing school in Paris, that very Madame

Marly's, of whom mention has been made in the last chapter. He took them to Italy and Switzerland. He hired a villa by the Lake of Como; a chateau on the borders of Lucerne. He followed the footsteps of Byron and D'Orsay, Madame de Stael and Lady Blessington; he affected art, literature, and music. He indulged his children's every caprice, he gratified their wildest fancies. It was only when the sons saw themselves penniless and professionless, with the great battle of life all before them, and with no weapons wherewith to fight; and the daughters found themselves left portionless, to win the best husbands they might in the matrimonial lottery: it was only at this crisis that these ungrateful children turned round upon poor, indulgent Lear, and reproached him for the extravagances they had helped him to perpetrate.

This was a cruelty which George Vane could never bring himself to comprehend. Had he denied them anything, these heartless children, that they should turn upon him now in his old age — it would have been rather a dangerous thing for anyone else to have alluded to his age, though he spoke freely enough of his grey hairs when bewailing his wrongs — and be angry with him, because he could not give them fortunes? This thanklessness was worse than a serpent's tooth. It was now that Mr. Vane began to quote "King Lear," piteously likening himself to that too confiding monarch.

But he was sixty years old now, and had lived his life. His gentle and trusting wife had died ten years before his money was gone, and of all his four children there was not one who would say a word in his defence. The most affectionate and dutiful of them were

only silent, and thought they did much in withholding their reproaches. So he let them go their ways, the two sons to fight the battle of life how they might — the two daughters to marry. They were both handsome and accomplished, and they married well. And being left quite alone in the world, with nothing left him but the traditions of a brilliant past, Mr. Vane united his misfortunes to those of a very beautiful girl who had been his daughter's governess, and who had fallen in love with his splendid graces in the very simplicity of her heart, thinking his grey hairs more beautiful than the raven locks of meaner men.

Yes: George Vane possessed the gift of fascination in a dangerous degree, and his second wife loved and believed in him in the day of his decline, as entirely as his first wife had done in the brighter hours of his prosperity. She loved and trusted him. She bore with a life of perpetual debt and daily difficulty. She sacrificed herself to the mean shifts and petty stratagems of a dishonest existence. She, whose nature was truth itself, humiliated herself for her husband's sake, and helped to play that pitiful, skulking game of hide-and-seek in which George Vane hoped to escape the honest struggles of poverty.

But she died young, worn out, perhaps, by these incessant miseries, and not able to draw consolation from the sham splendour and tinselly grandeur with which George Vane tried to invest his fallen state. She died within five years of her marriage, leaving a distracted and despairing old man as the sole guardian and protector of her only child.

This calamity was the bitterest blow that George Vane had ever been called upon to endure. He had

loved his second wife, the wife of his poverty and humiliation, far more dearly than he had loved the obedient partner of his splendour and prosperity. She had been more to him a thousand times, this gentle girl who had so uncomplainingly accepted the hardships of her lot, because there had been no idle vanities, no hollow glories, no Princes and Beefsteak Clubs, to stand between him and his love of her.

She was lost, and he remembered how little he had done to prove his affection for her. *She* had never reproached him; no word of upbraiding had ever crossed those tender lips. But how did he know that he had not wronged her as cruelly as he had wronged those noisy children who had betrayed and deserted him?

He remembered how often he had slighted her advice, her loving counsel, so pure and true, so modestly offered, so gently spoken. He remembered how many humiliations he had forced upon her, how many falsehoods he had compelled her to tell; how often he had imposed upon her affection, suffering her to slave for him in his blind selfishness.

He could remember all these things now that she was gone, and that it was too late; too late to fall at her feet and tell her that he was all unworthy of her love and goodness; too late to offer her even such poor atonement for the past as penitence and tears. A hundred tokens of her in his poor lodgings recalled her a hundred times a day, bringing the tears into this poor broken-down mourner's eyes.

He did not need the presence of his little daughter, whose dark grey eyes looked at him like hers, whose auburn hair had the same golden glory that he had so

often seen glistening in the sunshine as he sat lazily watching the low evening light upon his wife's drooping head. It seemed only yesterday that she had stood in the window working for him — for him.

His affliction left him for a long time a broken old man. He did not care in this dull interval of despair to keep up those outward shams of prosperity which he had so persistently preserved. His fashionable coats and boots, treasured so carefully of late, were no longer objects of tender care and delight to him. He ceased to go out into that ignorant and careless world in which he could still play the fine gentleman. He shut himself up and abandoned himself to his grief, and it was a long time before his frivolous nature recovered the shock he had suffered. It is not to be wondered at that, in the agony of his bereavement, his youngest child became unspeakably dear to him. He had severed all the links which had bound him to the past, and to his elder children. His second marriage had made a new era in his life. If he thought of these elder children at all, it was only to remember that some of them were living in luxury, and that they ought to support him in his penniless old age. If he wrote to them, he wrote begging-letters, appealing to them in exactly the same spirit as he might have appealed to the Duke of Wellington or Miss Burdett Coutts.

Yes; his youngest daughter usurped the place of an only child in the old man's heart. He indulged her as he had indulged the ungrateful elder children. He could not give her carriages and horses, liveried servants and splendid houses, but he could now and then prevail upon some weak-minded creditor to trust

him, and would come home triumphant to his shabby lodging, bearing spoils for his beloved Eleanor. He would hire a brougham from a confiding livery-stable keeper, and would take his little girl for a drive in the country. He would get her fine dresses from the silk-merciers who had supplied his elder daughters, and he would compensate her for the shabby miseries of her every-day existence by chance flashes of radiance and glory.

Then, again, he would very often obtain small sums of money, loans from private friends, it may be, or fleeting treasures from a mysterious source, of which his innocent little daughter had no knowledge. So, for the first ten or eleven years of her life, Miss Vane's existence was chequered by sudden glimpses of abnormal wealth — wonderful feast days of luxury and extravagance — which contrasted sharply with the dreary poverty of her ordinary experiences.

Thus it was no uncommon thing for this young lady to dine to-day in a tawdry and rather dirty parlour at Chelsea upon tea and red-herrings, and to-morrow to sit opposite her father in one of the sunny windows at the Crown and Sceptre, eating white bait with the calm enjoyment of a connoisseur, and looking placidly on while Mr. Vane gave himself ducal airs to the waiters, and found fault with the icing of his sparkling hock. There was scarcely any extravagance which this little girl had not seen her father perpetrate. She had received from him a birthday present of a two-guinea wax doll, at the very time at which her schooling account, at a certain humble little seminary near Cheyne Walk, remained unpaid, and her education was brought to a dead lock by reason of

this default. She had sighed for that golden-haired waxen plaything, and her father gave it to her because he loved her as he had always loved, weakly and foolishly.

She loved him in return: repaying him a hundred-fold for his affection by her innocent love and trust. To her he was all that was perfect, all that was noble and generous. The big talk, the glowing and sentimental discourse by which he was wont to impose upon himself, imposed upon her. She believed in that fancy portrait which he painted of himself, and which he himself believed in as a most faithful and unflattered likeness. She believed in that highly-coloured picture, and thought that George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane was indeed what he represented himself, and thought himself to be; an injured old man, a sainted martyr to the forgetfulness of the world, and the ingratitude of his children.

Poor Eleanor was never weary of listening to her father's stories about the Prince Regent, and all the lesser planets of the darkened sky in which Mr. Vane's light had once shone. She used to walk in the park with the old man in the sunny summer evenings, proud to see him bow to great people, who returned his recognition with friendly courtesy. She liked to fancy him in the days that were gone, riding side by side with those mighty ones of the earth, whom he was now content to watch wistfully across the iron railings. She was pleased to stroll about the West End in the dusky gloaming of the soft May night, and to look up at the lights in that princely mansion in Berkeley Square which George Vane had once occupied. He showed her the windows which had belonged to this

and that apartment; the drawing-room; the first Mrs. Vane's boudoir; the little girls' nursery and morning room. She fancied all those fairy chambers radiant with light and splendour; and then remembering the shabby rooms at Chelsea, clung closer to her father's arm, in her tender sorrow for his fallen state.

But she had inherited much of George Vane's sanguine temperament, and almost as firm as her belief in the past, which had been a reality, was her confidence in the splendid future, which her father hoped in. Nothing could have been more shadowy than the foundations upon which Mr. Vane had built for himself an airy castle. In his youth and middle age his most intimate friend and companion had been a certain Maurice de Crespigny, the owner of a noble estate in Berkshire, and *not* a friend of the Prince Regent's. So, while George Vane's two estates had melted away, and his three fortunes had been expended, Mr. de Crespigny, who was an invalid and a bachelor, had contrived to keep his land and his money.

There was only the difference of two or three years between the ages of the two friends. I believe that Maurice de Crespigny was the younger of the two. And it was during their early college life that the young men had entered into a romantic alliance, very chivalrous and honourable in its nature, but scarcely likely to stand the wear and tear of worldly experience.

They were to be friends through life and until death. They were to have no secrets from each other. If by any chance they should happen to fall in love with the same person — and I really think these sentimental collegians rather wished that such a contin-

gency might arise — one of them, the most noble, the most heroic, was quietly to fall back and suffer in silence, while the weaker won the prize. If either died a bachelor, he was to leave his fortune to the other, whatever less romantic and more common-place claimants, in the way of heirs presumptive, might press upon him.

These vows had been made at least five-and-forty years ago, but out of this folly of the past George Vane built his hope in the future. Maurice de Crespigny was now a soured and hypochondriacal old bachelor, shut in and defended on every side by greedy and sycophantic relations, and utterly unapproachable to his shabby old bosom friend; who could as easily have made his way out of one of the lowest dungeons of the Bastille as he could force an entrance into that closely-guarded citadel within which his college companion sat, lonely and dismal, a desolate old man, watched over by sharp eyes, greedily noteful of every token of his decay, ministered to by hands that would have worked eagerly at his winding-sheet, if by so doing they could have hastened the hour of his death.

If George Vane — remembering his old friend, perhaps, with some latent feeling of tenderness intermingled with his mercenary hopes — made an effort to penetrate the cruel barriers about him, he was repulsed with ignominy by the two maiden nieces who kept watch and ward at Woodlands. If he wrote to Mr. de Crespigny, his missive was returned unopened, with a satirical intimation that the dear invalid's health was not in a state to endure the annoyance of begging letters. He had made a hundred attempts to cross the

lines of the enemy, and had been mortified by a hundred failures; but his sanguine nature was not to be subdued by any humiliation, and he still believed, firmly and entirely, that whenever Maurice de Crespigny's will came to be opened, his name, and his alone, would appear as sole heir to his old friend's wealth. He forgot that Maurice de Crespigny was his junior by some two or three years; for he had always heard of him of late as a feeble invalid tottering upon the verge of the grave; while he himself was erect and stalwart, broad-chested and soldierly-looking; so very soldierly in appearance that the sentinels on guard in the park were wont to salute him as he passed them, mistaking him for some military magnate.

Yes, he believed the day would come when poor De Crespigny — he always spoke of his friend with a certain pitiful tenderness — would drop quietly into his grave, and when *he* would reign at Woodlands with his darling Eleanor, avenging himself upon his ungrateful elder children, reopening accounts with his old creditors — in all his visions of grandeur and patronage he never thought of paying his debts — and arising from the dull ashes of his poverty, a splendid phoenix, golden-plumed and exultant.

He taught his daughter this belief as religiously as he taught her the simple prayers which she said nightly at his knee. With all his faults he was no unbeliever, though the time which he devoted to religious observances made a very small portion of his existence. He taught Eleanor to believe in the day that was to come, and the little girl saw the light of future splendour gleaming athwart the dreary swamp

of difficulty through which she waded patiently by her father's side.

But the day came when George Vane and his child were to be separated, for a time at least. Eleanor's twelfth birthday was very near at hand, and she had as yet received no better education than the rather limited course of instruction which was to be obtained for a guinea and a half a quarter at the day school near Cheyne Walk. For nearly six years, inclusive of many intervals of non-attendance consequent upon non-payment, Miss Vane had frequented this humble seminary, in company with the butchers and bakers and other plebeian inhabitants of the district. But by the time she was twelve years old the various sources from which her father's very desultory income had been drawn had one by one run dry and failed him. The weakest and most long-suffering of his creditors had crossed his name out of their ledgers; his friends had ceased to believe in the fiction of delayed remittances, urgent temporary need, and early repayment; and he could no longer count upon an occasional five-pound note when the Chelsea landlady became clamorous, and the Chelsea general dealer refused to send home another ounce of tea, except on payment of ready money.

A desperate crisis had come, and in his despair the old man forgot his pride. For Eleanor's sake, if not for his own, he must endure humiliation. He must appeal to his eldest daughter, the hard-hearted but wealthy Hortensia Bannister, who had lost her stockbroker husband a twelvemonth before, and was now a rich and childless widow. Yes — he wiped

the tears of humiliation away from his faded cheeks as he arrived at this resolution — he would try and forget the past, and would take Eleanor with him to Hyde Park Gardens, and appeal to her cruel sister in her behalf. His determination was speedily carried out, for he went to work with something of that desperate courage which a condemned criminal may feel when he goes to execution, and one sunny morning early in the June of 1850, he and his daughter sat in Mrs. Bannister's handsome drawing-room, fearfully awaiting the advent of that lady. She came to them after a very brief delay, for she was business-like and uncompromising in her habits, and she had been prepared for this visit by a long, pitiful, explanatory letter from her father, in reply to which she had written very coldly and concisely, appointing an early interview.

She was a severe-looking woman of about five-and-thirty, with a hard face, and heavy black eyebrows, which met over her handsome aquiline nose when she frowned, which she did a great deal too often, poor Eleanor thought. Her features were like those of her father, but her grim and stony expression was entirely her own, and was perhaps the result of that early and bitter disappointment of finding herself a portionless girl, deserted by the man she loved, who fell away from her when he discovered the state of her father's fortunes, and compelled to marry for money, or to accept the wretched alternative of a life of poverty and drudgery.

This harsh disappointed woman affected no pretence of tender feeling for her half-sister. Perhaps the sight of Eleanor's childish beauty was scarcely

pleasant to her. She herself had drawn a dreary blank in the great lottery of life, in spite of her wealth; and she may have envied this child her unknown future, which could not well be so dismal as the childless widow's empty existence.

But Mrs. Bannister was a religious woman, and tried to do her duty in a hard, uncompromising way, in which good works were not beautified by any such flimsy adornments as love and tenderness. So when she heard that her father lived from day to day a wretched hand-to-mouth existence, haunted with the grim phantom of starvation, she was seized by a sudden sense that she had been very wicked to this weak old man, and she agreed to allow him a decent pittance, which would enable him to live about as comfortably as a half-pay officer or a small annuitant. She made this concession sternly enough, and lectured her father so severely that he may be perhaps forgiven if he was not very grateful for his daughter's bounty, so far as he himself went; but he did make a feeble protestation of his thankfulness when Mrs. Bannister further declared her willingness to pay a certain premium, in consideration of which Eleanor Vane might be received in a respectable boarding-school as an apprentice or pupil teacher.

It was thus that the little girl became acquainted with the Misses Bennett of Wilmington House, Brixton; and it was in the household of these ladies that three years of her life had been passed. Three quiet and monotonous years of boarding-school drudgery, which had only been broken by two brief visits to her father, who had taken up his abode in Paris; where he lived secure from the persecution of a few of his latter-day

creditors — not the west-end tradesmen who had known him in his prime, *they* were resigned and patient enough under their losses — but a few small dealers who had trusted him in his decline, and who were not rendered lenient by the memory of former profits.

In Paris, Mr. Vane had very little chance of obtaining any information about his friend Maurice de Crespigny, but he still looked forward confidently to that visionary future in which he was to be master of the Woodlands estate. He had taken care to write a letter, soon after Eleanor's birth, which had been artfully conveyed to his friend, announcing the advent of this youngest child, and dwelling much on his love for her. He cherished some vague notion that, in the event of his death occurring before that of Maurice de Crespigny, the old man might leave his wealth to Eleanor. The contumely with which he had been treated by the maiden harpies who kept watch over his old friend had been pleasant to him rather than otherwise, for in the anger of these elderly damsels he saw an evidence of their fear.

"If they knew that poor De Crespigny's money was left to them, they wouldn't be so savage," he thought. "It's evident they're by no means too confident about the future."

But there were other relatives of the old man's, less fortunate than the maiden sisters, who had found their way into the citadel, and planted themselves *en permanence* at Woodlands. There was a married niece, who had once been a beauty. This lady had been so foolish as to marry against her rich uncle's wishes, and was now a widow, living in the neighbourhood of

Woodlands upon an income of two hundred a year. This lady's only son, Launcelot Darrel, had in his boyhood been a favourite with the old man, and was known to cherish expectations about Maurice de Crespigny's fortune. But the maiden sisters were patient and indefatigable women. No sacred fire was ever watched more carefully by classic vestal than was the ireful flame which burned in Maurice de Crespigny's heart when he remembered his married niece's ingratitude and disobedience. The unwearying old maids kept his indignation alive by every feminine subtlety, by every diplomatic device. Heaven knows what they wanted with their uncle's money, for they were prim damsels, who wore stuff shoes and scanty dresses made in the fashion of their youth. They had outlived the very faculty of enjoyment, and their wants were almost as simple as those of the robins that perched upon their window sills; but for all this they were as eager to become possessors of the old man's wealth as the most heartless and spendthrift heir, tormented by Israelitish creditors, and subsisting entirely upon post obits.

CHAPTER IV.

Upon the Threshold of a Great Sorrow.

It was nearly noon when Eleanor Vane awoke upon the morning after her journey; for this young lady was a good sleeper, and was taking her revenge for four-and-twenty hours of wakefulness. I doubt, indeed, if she would have opened her eyes when she did, had not her father tapped at the door of her tiny chamber and told her the hour.

She woke smiling, like a beautiful infant who has always seen loving eyes watching above its cradle.

"Papa, darling," she cried, "is it you? I've just been dreaming that I was at Brixton. How delightful to wake and hear your voice. I won't be long, papa dear. But you haven't waited breakfast all this time, have you?"

"No, my dear. I have a cup of coffee and a roll brought me every morning at nine from a *traiteur's* over the way. I've ordered some breakfast for you, but I wouldn't wake you till twelve. Dress quickly, Nell. It's a lovely morning, and I'll take you for a walk."

It was indeed a lovely morning. Eleanor Vane flung back the tawdry damask curtains, and let the full glory of the August noontide sun into her little room. Her window had been open all the night through, and the entresol was so close to the street that she could hear the conversation of the people upon the pavement below. The foreign jargon sounded plea-

sant to her in its novelty. It was altogether different to the French language as she had been accustomed to hear it at Brixton; where a young lady forfeited a halfpenny every time she forgot herself so far as to give utterance to her thoughts or desires in the commonplace medium of her mother tongue. The merry voices, the barking of dogs, the rattling of wheels and ringing of bells in the distance mingled in a cheerful clamour.

As Eleanor Vane let in that glorious noontide sunlight, it seemed to her that she had let in the morning of a new life; a new and happier existence, brighter and pleasanter than the dull boarding school monotony she had had so much of.

Her pure young soul rejoiced in the sunshine, the strange city, the change, the shadowy hopes that beckoned to her in the future, the atmosphere of love which her father's presence always made in the shabbiest home. She had not been unhappy at Brixton, because it was her nature to be happy under difficulties, because she was a bright, spontaneous creature to whom it was almost impossible to be sorrowful; but she had looked forward yearningly to this day, in which she was to join her father in Paris, never perhaps to go far away from him again. And it had come at last, this long-hoped-for day, the sunny opening of a new existence. It had come; and even the heavens had sympathy with her gladness, and wore their fairest aspect in honour of this natal day of her new life.

She did not linger long over her toilet, though she lost a good deal of time in unpacking her box — which had not been very neatly packed, by the way — and

had considerable trouble in finding hair-brushes and combs, cuffs, collars, and ribbons, and all the rest of the small paraphernalia with which she wished to decorate herself.

But when she emerged at last, radiant and smiling, with her long golden hair falling in loose curls over her shoulders, and her pale muslin dress adorned with fluttering blue ribbons, her father was fain to cry out aloud at the sight of his darling's beauty. She kissed him a dozen times, but took very little notice of his admiration — she seemed, in fact, scarcely conscious that he did admire her — and then ran into the adjoining room to caress a dog, an eccentric French poodle, which had been George Vane's faithful companion during the three years he had spent in Paris.

"Oh, papa!" Eleanor cried joyously, returning to the sitting-room with the dingy white animal in her arms, "I am so pleased to find Fido. You didn't speak of him in your letters, and I was afraid you had lost him perhaps, or that he was dead. But here he is, just as great a darling, and just as dirty as ever."

The poodle, who was divided in half, upon that unpleasant principle common to his species, and who was white and curly in front, and smooth and pinky behind, reciprocated Miss Vane's caresses very liberally. He leaped about her knees when she set him down upon the slippery floor, and yelped wild outcries of delight. He was not permitted to pass the night in Mr. Vane's apartments, but slept in a dismal outhouse behind the butcher's shop, and it was thus that Eleanor had not seen him upon her arrival in the Rue L'Archevêque.

The young lady was so anxious to go out with her

father, so eager to be away on the broad boulevards with the happy idle people of that wonderful city in which nobody ever seems to be either busy or sorrowful, that she made very short work of her roll and coffee, and then ran back to her little bed-chamber to array herself for a promenade. She came out five minutes afterwards, dressed in a black silk mantle and a white transparent bonnet, which looked fleecy and cloud-like against her bright auburn hair. That glorious hair was suffered to fall from under the bonnet and stream about her shoulders like golden rain, for she had never yet attained the maturer dignity of wearing her luxuriant tresses plaited and twisted in a hard knot at the back of her head.

"Now, papa, please, where are we to go?"

"Wherever you like, my darling," the old man answered; "I mean to give you a treat to-day. You shall spend the morning how you like, and we'll dine on the Boulevard Poissonnier. I've received a letter from Mrs. Bannister. It came before you were up. I am to call in the Rue de la Paix for a hundred and six pounds. A hundred to be paid to Madame Marly, and six for me; my monthly allowance, my dear, at the rate of thirty shillings a week."

Mr. Vane sighed as he named the sum. It would have been better for this broken down old spendthrift if he could have received his pittance weekly, or even daily; for it was his habit to dine at the Trois Frères, and wear pale straw-coloured gloves, and a flower in his button-hole, at the beginning of the month, and to subsist on rolls and coffee towards its close.

He unfolded the narrow slip of paper upon which his eldest daughter had written the banker's address

and the amount which Mr. Vane was to demand, and looked at the magical document fondly, almost proudly. Any one unfamiliar with his frivolous and sanguine nature, might have wondered at the change which had taken place in his manner since the previous night, when he had tearfully bewailed his daughter's cruelty.

He had been an old man then, degraded, humiliated, broken down by sorrow and shame: to-day he was young, handsome, gay, defiant, pompous, prepared to go out into the world and hold his place amongst the butterflies once more. He rejoiced in the delicious sensation of having money to spend. Every fresh five-pound note was a new lease of youth and happiness to George Vane.

The father and daughter went out together, and the butcher neglected his business in order to stare after Miss Vane, and the butcher's youngest child, a tiny damsel in a cambric mobcap, cried out, "Oh, la belle demoiselle!" as Eleanor turned the corner of the narrow street into the sunny thoroughfare beyond. Fido came frisking after his master's daughter, and Mr. Vane had some difficulty in driving the animal back. Eleanor would have liked the dog to go with them in their noontide ramble through the Parisian streets, but her father pointed out the utter absurdity of such a proceeding.

Mr. Vane conducted his daughter through a maze of streets behind the Madeleine. There was no Boulevard Malesherbes in those days, to throw this part of the city open to the sweep of a park of artillery. Eleanor's eyes lit up with gladness as they emerged from the narrower streets behind the church into the wide boulevard, not as handsome then as it

is to-day, but very broad and airy, gay and lightsome withal.

An involuntary cry of delight broke from Eleanor's lips.

"Oh, papa," she said, "it is so different from Brixton. But where are we going first, papa, dear?"

"Over the way, my dear, to Blount & Co.'s, in the Rue de la Paix. We'll get this money at once, Nelly, and we'll carry it straight to Madame Marly. They had no occasion to insult us, my dear. We have not sunk so low, yet. No, no, not quite so low as to rob our own children."

"Papa, darling, don't think of that cruel letter. I don't like to take the money when I remember that. Don't think of it, papa."

Mr. Vane shook his head.

"I *will* think of it, my dear," he answered, in a tone of sorrowful indignation — the indignation of an honourable man, who rebels against a cruel stigma of dishonour. "I will think of it, Eleanor. I have been called a thief — a thief, Eleanor. I am not very likely to forget *that*, I think."

They were in the Rue de la Paix by this time. George Vane was very familiar with the banker's office, for he had been in the habit of receiving his monthly pension through an order on Messrs. Blount & Co. He left Eleanor at the foot of the stairs, while he ascended to the office on the first floor; and he returned five minutes afterwards, carrying a bundle of notes in one hand, and a delicious little roll of napoleons in the other. The notes fluttered pleasantly in the summer air, as he showed them to his daughter.

"We will go at once to Madame Marly, my darling,"

he said, gaily, "and give her these, without a moment's unnecessary delay. They shall have no justification in calling me a thief, Eleanor. You will write to your sister by this afternoon's post, perhaps, my dear, and tell her that I did not try to rob you. I think you owe so much as that to your poor old father."

George Vane's daughter clung lovingly to his arm, looking up tenderly and entreatingly in his face.

"Papa, darling, how can you say such things," she cried. "I will write and tell Mrs. Bannister that she has been very cruel, and that her insulting letter has made me hate to take her paltry money. But, papa, dearest, how can you talk of robbing *me*. If this money is really mine, take it, take every penny of it; if — if — you owe it to anybody who worries you; or if you want it for anything in the world. I can go back to Brixton and earn my living to-morrow, papa. Miss Bennett and Miss Sophia told me so before I came away. You don't know how useful they began to find me with the little ones. Take the money, papa, dear, if you want it."

Mr. Vane turned upon his daughter with almost tragic indignation.

"Eleanor," he said, "do you know me so little that you dare to insult me by such a proposition as this? No; if I were starving I would not take this money. Am I so lost and degraded that even the child I love turns upon me in my old age?"

The hand which held the bank notes trembled with passionate emotion as the old man spoke.

"Papa, darling," Eleanor pleaded, "indeed, indeed, I did not mean to wound you."

"Let me hear no more of this, then, Eleanor, let

me hear no more of it," answered Mr. Vane, drawing himself up with a dignity that would have become a classic toga, rather than the old man's fashionable over-coat. "I am not angry with you, my darling, I was only hurt, I was only hurt. My children have never known me, Eleanor, they have never known me. Come, my dear."

Mr. Vane put aside his tragic air, and plunged into the Rue St. Honoré, where he called for a packet of gloves that had been cleaned for him. He put the gloves in his pocket, and then strolled back into the Rue Castiglione, looking at the vehicles in the roadway as he went. He was waiting to select the most elegantly appointed of the hackney equipages crawling slowly past.

"It's a pity the government insist on putting a painted badge upon them," he said, thoughtfully. "When I last called on Madame Marly, Charles the Tenth was at the Tuileries, and I had my travelling chariot and pair at Meurice's, besides a Britska for Mrs. Vane."

He had pitched upon a very new and shining vehicle, with a smart coachman, by this time, and he made that half hissing, half whistling noise peculiar to Parisians when they call a hackney carriage.

Eleanor sprang lightly into the vehicle, and spread her flowing muslin skirts upon the cushions as she seated herself. The passers by looked admiringly at the smiling young Anglaise with her white bonnet and nimbus of glittering hair.

"Au Bois, Cocher," Mr. Vane cried, as he took his place by his daughter.

He had bought a tiny bouquet for his button-hole

near the Madeleine, and he selected a pair of white doeskin gloves, and drew them carefully on his well-shaped hands. He was as much a dandy to-day as he had been in those early days when the Prince and Brummel were his exalted models.

The drive across the Place de la Concorde, and along the Champs Elysées, was an exquisite pleasure to Eleanor Vane; but it was even yet more exquisite when the light carriage rolled away along one of the avenues in the Bois de Boulogne, where the shadows of the green leaves trembled on the grass, and all nature rejoiced beneath the cloudless August sky. The day was a shade too hot, perhaps, and had been certainly growing hotter since noon, but Eleanor was too happy to remember that.

"How nice it is to be with you, papa, darling," she said, "and how I wish I wasn't going to this school. I should be so happy in that dear little lodging over the butcher's, and I could go out as morning governess to some French children, couldn't I? I shouldn't cost you much, I know, papa."

Mr. Vane shook his head.

"No, no, my love. Your education must be completed. Why should you be less accomplished than your sisters? You shall occupy as brilliant a position as ever they occupied, my love, or a better one, perhaps. You have seen me under a cloud, Eleanor; but you shall see the sunshine yet. You'll scarcely know your old father, my poor girl, when you see him in the position he has been used to occupy; yes, used to occupy, my dear. This lady we are going to see, Madame Marly, *she* remembers, my love. She could

tell you what sort of a man George Vane was five-and-twenty years ago."

The house in which the fashionable school-mistress who had "finished" the elder daughters of George Vane still received her pupils, was a white walled villa, half-hidden in one of the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne.

The little hired carriage drew up before a door in the garden wall, and a portress came out to reply to the coachman's summons.

Unhappily, the portress said, Madame was not at home. Madame's assistants were at home, and would be happy to receive Monsieur and Mademoiselle. That might be perhaps altogether the same thing, the portress suggested.

No, Monsieur replied, he must see Madame herself. Ah, but then nothing could be so unfortunate. Madame, who so seldom quitted the Pension, had to-day driven into Paris to arrange her affairs, and would not return until sunset.

Mr. Vane left his card with a few words written upon it in pencil, to the effect that he would call at two o'clock the next day, in the charge of the portress; and the carriage drove back towards Paris.

"Bear witness, Eleanor," said the old man, "bear witness that I tried to pay this money away immediately after receiving it. You will be good enough to mention that fact in your letter to my eldest daughter."

He had carried the notes in his hand all this time, as if eager to deliver them over to the school-mistress, but he now put them into his breast-pocket. I think upon the whole he was rather pleased at the idea of

retaining custody of the money for the next twenty-four hours. It was not his own, but the mere possession of it gave him a pleasant sense of importance; and again he might very probably have an opportunity of displaying the bank notes, incidentally, to some of his associates. Unhappily for this lonely old man, his few Parisian acquaintances were of a rather shabby and not too reputable calibre, and were therefore likely to be somewhat impressed by the sight of a hundred and twenty-five napoleons, in crisp, new notes upon the Bank of France.

It was past three when Mr. Vane and his daughter alighted in front of the Palais Royal, and the coachman claimed payment for two hours and a-half. The old man had changed the first of his six napoleons at the glove-cleaners, and he had a handful of loose silver in his waistcoat pocket, so the driver was quickly paid and dismissed, and Eleanor entered the Palais Royal, that paradise of cheap jewellery and dinners, hanging on her father's arm.

Mr. Vane bore patiently with his daughter's enthusiastic admiration of the diamonds and the paste, the glittering realities and almost as glittering shams in the jewellers' windows. Eleanor wanted to look at everything, the trinkets, and opera-glasses, and port-manteaus, and china, — everything was new and beautiful. The fountain was playing; noisy children were running about amongst equally noisy nurses and idle loungers. A band was playing close to the fountain. The chinking of tea-spoons and cups and saucers, sounded in the Café de la Rotonde: people had not begun to dine yet, but the windows and glazed nooks in the doorways of the restaurants were splendid with

their displays of gigantic melons, and dewy purple grapes, cucumbers, pears, tomatoes, and peaches. George Vane allowed his daughter to linger a long time before all the shops. He was rather ashamed of her exuberant delight, and unrestrained enthusiasm; for so much pleasure in these simple things was scarcely consistent with that *haut ton* which the old man still affected even in his downfall. But he had not the heart to interfere with his daughter's happiness — was it not strange happiness to *him* to have this beautiful creature with him, clinging to his arm, and looking up at him with a face that was glorified by her innocent joy.

They left the Palais Royal at last, before half its delights were exhausted, as Eleanor thought, and went through the Rue Richelieu to the Place de la Bourse, where Mr. Vane's eager companion looked wistfully at the doors of the theatre opposite the great Temple of Commerce.

"Oh, papa," she said, "how I should like to go to a theatre to-night."

Miss Vane had seen a good deal of the English drama during her Chelsea life, for the old man knew some of the London managers, men who remembered him in his prosperity, and were glad to give him admission to their boxes now and then, out of pure benevolence. But the Parisian theatres seemed mysteriously delightful to Eleanor, inasmuch as they were strange.

"Can you get tickets for the theatres here, papa," she asked, "as you used in London?"

Mr. Vane shrugged his shoulders.

"No, my love," he said, "it's not quite such an

easy matter. I know a man who writes farces now and then for the Funambules — a very clever fellow — but he doesn't get many orders to give away, and that's not exactly the theatre I should like to take you to. I'll tell you what, though, Eleanor, I'll take you to the Porte St. Martin to-night — why should I deny my child an innocent pleasure — I'll take you to the Porte St. Martin, unless —”

George Vane paused, and a gloomy shadow crept over his face — a shade that made him look an old man. His youthfulness of appearance entirely depended upon the buoyancy of a nature which contended with age. The moment his spirits sank he looked what he was — an old man.

“Unless what, papa, dearest?” Eleanor asked.

“I — I had an appointment for to-night, my love, with — with a couple of gentlemen who — But I won't keep it, Eleanor, — no, no, I'll not keep it. I'll take you to the theatre. I can afford you that pleasure.”

“Dear, dear papa, you never refuse me any pleasure; but it would be so selfish of me to ask you to break your appointment with these two gentlemen. You had better keep it.”

“No, no, my dear — I'd — it would be better — perhaps. Yes, I'll take you to the Porte St. Martin.”

Mr. Vane spoke hesitatingly. The shadow had not yet left his face. Had his daughter been less occupied by the delights of the Parisian shops, the novelty and gaiety of the crowd, she must surely have observed the change in that idolised father.

But she observed nothing, she could remember

nothing but her happiness. This glorious day of reunion and delight seemed indeed the beginning of a new life. She looked back wonderingly at the dull routine of her boarding-school existence. Could it be possible that it was only a day or two since she was in the Brixton school-room hearing the little ones, the obstinate, incorrigible little ones, their hateful lessons, — their odious monotonous repetitions of dry facts about William the Conqueror and Buenos Ayres, the manufacture of tallow candles, and the nine parts of speech?

They strolled on the boulevard till six o'clock, and then ascended the shining staircase of a restaurant on the Boulevard Poissonnier, where Eleanor saw herself reflected in so many mirrors that she was almost bewildered by the repetition of her own auburn hair and white bonnet.

The long saloons were filled with eager diners, who looked up from their knives and forks as the English girl went by.

"We dine à la carte here," her father whispered: "tis is a fête day, and I mean to give you a first-class dinner."

Mr. Vane found a vacant table in an open window. The house was at a corner of the boulevard, and this window looked down the crowded thoroughfare towards the Madeleine. Eleanor exclaimed once more as the prospect burst upon her, and she saw all the boulevard with its gay splendour, spread out, as it were, at her feet; but her father was too busy with the waiter and the *carte* to observe her manifestation of delight.

Mr. Vane was an epicure, and prided himself upon his talent for ordering a dinner. There was a good

deal of *finesse* displayed by him now-a-days in the arrangement of a repast; for poverty had taught him all kinds of little diplomatic contrivances whereby he might, as it were, mingle economy and extravagance. He ordered such and such dishes "for one," intending to divide them with his child. A few Ostend oysters, some soup, — *purée crécy* — a little dish of beef and olives, a *sole normande*, a quarter of a roast chicken, and a *Charlotte Plombières*.

It was a long time since Eleanor had eaten one of her father's epicurean feasts, and she did ample justice to the dinner, even in spite of the ever recurrent distractions upon the boulevard below.

The dishes followed each other slowly, for the un-resting waiters had many claimants on their attention, and the sun was low in the cloudless western sky when Mr. Vane and his daughter left the restaurant. It was nearly night; the lights began to shine out through a hot white mist, for the heat had grown more and more oppressive as the day had declined. The Parisians sitting at little marble tables on the pavement outside the cafés fanned themselves with their newspapers, and drank effervescing 'drinks pertinaciously. It was a night upon which one should have had nothing more laborious to do than to sit outside Tortoni's and eat ices.

The noise and clamour, the oppressive heat, the bustle and confusion of the people rushing to the theatres, made Eleanor's head ache. One cannot go on being unutterably happy for ever, and perhaps the day's excitement had been almost too much for this young school-girl. She had walked long distances already upon the burning asphalte of the wonderful city, and

she was beginning to be tired. Mr. Vane never thought of this: he had been accustomed to walk about day after day, and sometimes all day, for what should a lonely Englishman do in Paris but walk about? and he forgot that the fatigue might be too much for his daughter. He walked on, therefore, with Eleanor still clinging to his arm; past the Ambigu, beyond the Barrière St. Antoine; and still the long lamp-lit boulevard stretched before them, away into immeasurable distance, as it appeared to Miss Vane.

The hot white mist seemed to grow denser as the evening advanced; the red sun blazed and flashed on every available scrap of crystal; the gas-lamps newly illumined, strove against that setting sun. It was all light, and heat, and noise, and confusion, Eleanor thought, upon the boulevard. Very splendid, of course, but rather bewildering. She would have been glad to sit down to rest upon one of the benches on the edge of the pavement; but, as her father did not seem tired, she still walked on, patiently and uncomplainingly.

"We'll go into one of the theatres presently, Nelly," Mr. Vane said.

He had recovered his spirits under the invigorating influence of a bottle of Cliquot's champagne, and the gloomy shadow had quite passed away from his face.

It was nearly nine o'clock, and quite dark, when they turned towards the Madeleine again, on the way back to the Porte St. Martin. They had not gone far when Mr. Vane stopped, suddenly confronted by two young men who were walking arm-in-arm.

"Hulloa!" one of them cried in French, "you have served us a handsome trick, my friend."

George Vane stammered out an apology. His

daughter had returned from school, he said, and he wished to show her Paris.

"Yes, yes," the Frenchman answered; "but we were aware of Mademoiselle's intended return, and it was arranged in spite of that that we should meet this evening: was it not so, my friend?"

He asked this question of his companion, who nodded rather sulkily, and turned away with a half weary, half dissatisfied air.

Eleanor looked at the two young men, wondering what new friends her father had made in Paris. The Frenchman was short and stout, and had a fair, florid complexion. Eleanor was able to see this, for his face was turned to the lamplight, as he talked to her father. He was rather showily dressed, in fashionably cut clothes, that looked glossy and new, and he twirled a short silver-headed cane in his gloved hands.

The other man was tall and slender, shabbily and untidily dressed in garments of a rakish cut, that hung loosely about him. His hands were thrust deep in the pockets of his loose overcoat, and his hat was slouched over his forehead.

Eleanor Vane only caught one passing glimpse of this man's face as he turned sulkily away; but she could see the glimmer of a pair of bright, restless black eyes under the shadow of his hat, and the fierce curve of a very thick black moustache, which completely concealed his mouth. He had turned, not towards the lighted shop windows, but to the roadway; and he was amusing himself by kicking a wisp of straw to and fro upon the sharp edge of the curbstone, with the toe of his shabby patent leather boot.

The Frenchman drew George Vane aside, and

talked to him for a few minutes in an undertone, gesticulating after the manner of his nation, and evidently persuading the old man to do something or other which he shrank from doing. But Mr. Vane's resistance seemed of a very feeble nature, and the Frenchman conquered, for his last shrug was one of triumph. Eleanor, standing by herself, midway between the sulky young man upon the curbstone and her father and the Frenchman, perceived this. She looked up anxiously as Mr. Vane returned to her.

"My love," the old man said, hesitatingly, nervously trifling with his glove as he spoke: "do you think you could find your way back to the Rue l'Archevêque?"

"Find my way back? Why, papa?"

"I — I mean, could you find your way back a — alone."

"Alone!"

She echoed the word with a look of mingled disappointment and alarm.

"Alone, papa?"

But here the Frenchman interposed eagerly.

Nothing was more simple, he said: Mademoiselle had only to walk straight on to the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs; she would then, and then —

He ran off into a string of rapid directions, not one of which Eleanor heard. She was looking at her father, Heaven knows how earnestly, for she saw in his face, in his nervous hesitating manner, something that told her there was some sinister influence to be dreaded from this garrulous, eager Frenchman and his silent companion.

"Papa, dear," she said, in a low, almost imploring voice, "do you really wish me to go back alone?"

"Why — why, you see my dear, I — I don't exactly wish — but there are appointments which, as Monsieur remarks, not — not unreasonably, should not be broken, and —"

"You will stay out late, papa, perhaps, with these gentlemen —"

"No, no, my love, no, no; for an hour or so; not longer."

Eleanor looked up sorrowfully in the face she loved so dearly. Vague memories of grief and trouble in the past, mingled with as vague a presentiment of trouble in the future, filled her mind: she clasped her hands imploringly upon her father's arm.

"Come home with me to-night, papa," she said; "It is my first night at home. Come back, and we'll play *écarté* as we used at Chelsea. You remember teaching me."

Mr. Vane started, as if the tender grasp upon his arm had stung into his flesh.

"I — I can't come home to-night, Eleanor. At least, not for an hour. There — there are social laws, my dear, which must be observed; and when — when a gentleman is asked to give another his revenge, he — he can't refuse. I'll put you into a carriage, my darling, if you think you can't find your way."

"Oh, no, papa, dear, it's not that. I can find my way."

The Frenchman here interposed for the second time with some complimentary speech, addressed to Eleanor, who very imperfectly understood its purport. He had slipped his arm through that of George Vane, taking possession of him in a manner by that friendly gesture. In all this time the other man had never

stirred from his sulky attitude upon the edge of the pavement.

Mr. Vane took his daughter's hand.

"I am sorry I can't take you to the theatre, my love," he said, in the same hesitating manner. "I—I regret that you should be disappointed, but — good night, my dear, good night. I shall be home by eleven; but don't sit up for me; don't on any account sit up."

He pressed her hand, held it for a few moments, as if scarcely knowing what to do with it, and then suddenly dropped it, with something of a guilty manner.

The Frenchman, with his arm still linked in the old man's, wheeled sharply round, and walked away towards the Barrière Saint Antoine, leaving Eleanor standing alone amongst the passers-by, looking wistfully after her father. The other man looked up as the Frenchman led Mr. Vane away, and slowly followed them, with his head bent and his hands in his pockets. Eleanor stood quite still watching her father's erect figure, the short Frenchman, and the tall, sulky stranger following the other two, until all three were out of sight. Then turning homewards with a half-repressed sigh, she looked sadly down the long lamplit vista. It was very beautiful, very gay, brilliant, and splendid; but all that splendour and gaiety made her feel only the more lonely, now that her father had left her. The first day, the natal day of her new life, seemed to end very drearily, after all.

CHAPTER V.

Waiting.

MISS Vane walked very slowly homeward through the hot, breathless summer night. She was too sorrowful, too much depressed by the sudden disappointment which had fallen like a dark shadow upon the close of the day that had begun so brightly, to be embarrassed by any uncomfortable sense of her loneliness in the crowded thoroughfare.

No one molested or assailed her — she walked serene in her youth and innocence; though the full radiance of the lamplight rarely fell upon her face without some passing glance of admiration resting there also. She never once thought that her father had done wrong in leaving her to walk alone through that crowded Parisian street. In the unselfishness of her loving nature she scarcely remembered her disappointment about the theatre; not even when she passed the brilliantly lighted edifice, and looked, a little wistfully perhaps, at the crowd upon the threshold.

She was uneasy and unhappy about her father, because in all her Chelsea experiences she remembered evil to have resulted from his going out late at night; vague and mysterious trouble, the nature of which he had never revealed to her, but whose effects had haunted him and depressed him for many dreary days. He had been sometimes, indeed, very often, poorer after a late absence from his shabby Chelsea lodging; he had been now and then richer; but he had always

been alike remorseful and miserable after those occasional nights of dissipation.

His daughter was sorrowful therefore at parting with him. She knew that, in spite of his declaration that he would be home at eleven, it would be between one and two in the morning when he returned; not tipsy — no, thank Heaven, he was no drunkard — but with a nervous, wretched, half-demented manner, which was perhaps more sad to see than any ordinary intoxication.

"I was in hopes papa would always stay at home with me now that I am grown up," the young lady thought very sadly. "When I was little, of course it was different; I couldn't amuse him. Though we were very happy sometimes then; and I could play *écarté*, or cribbage, or whist with two dummies. If I can get on very well with my education at Madame Marly's, and then get a situation as morning governess for a large salary — morning governesses do get high salaries sometimes — how happy papa and I might be."

Her spirits revived under the influence of cheering thoughts such as these. I have said before that it was scarcely possible for her to be long unhappy. Her step grew lighter and faster as she walked homeward. The glory of the gas lights brightened with the brightening of her hopes. She began to linger now and then before some of the most attractive of the shops, with almost the same intense rapture and delight that she had felt in the morning.

She was standing before a book-stall, or rather an open shop, reading the titles of the paper-covered romances, with the full glare of the shadeless gas lights on her face, when she was startled by a loud, hearty

English voice, which exclaimed without one murmur of warning or preparation:

"Don't tell me that this tall young woman with the golden curls, is Miss Eleanor Vandeleur Vane, of Regent Gardens, King's Road, Chelsea, London, Middlesex. Please don't tell me anything of the kind, for I can't possibly believe anybody but Jack-and-the-beanstalk could have grown at such a rate."

Eleanor Vane turned round to greet this noisy gentleman.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, putting both her hands into the broad palm held out before her, "is it really you? Who would have thought of seeing you in Paris?"

"Or you, Miss Vane? We heard you were at school at Brixton."

"Yes, Dick," the young lady answered; "but I have come home now. Papa lives here, you know, and I am going to a finishing school in the Bois de Boulogne, and then I am going to be a morning governess, and live with papa always."

"You are a great deal too pretty for a governess," said the young man, looking admiringly at the bright face lifted up to him; "your mistress would snub you. Miss Vane, you'd better —"

"What, Dick?"

"Try our shop."

"What, be a scene-painter, Dick?" cried Eleanor, laughing. "It would be funny for a woman to be a scene-painter."

"Of course, Miss Vane. But nobody talked of scene-painting. You don't suppose I'd ask you to stand on the top of a ladder to put in skies and backgrounds, do you? There are other occupations at the Royal

Waterloo Phoenix besides scene-painting. But I don't want to talk to you about that: I know how savage your poor old dad used to be when we talked of the Phoenix. What do you think I am over here for?"

"What, Richard?"

"Why, they're doing a great drama in eight acts and thirty-two tableaux at the Porte St. Martin; Raoul l'Empoisonneur it's called, Ralph the Poisoner; and I'm over here to pick up the music, sketch the scenery and effects, and translate the play. Something like versatility there, I think, for five-and-thirty shillings a week."

"Dear Richard, you were always so clever."

"To be sure; it runs in the family."

"And the Signora, she is well, I hope!"

"Pretty well; the teaching goes on *tant bon que mauvais*, as our friends over here say. The Clementi is a little thinner in tone than when you heard it last, and a little further off concert pitch; but as most of my aunt's pupils sing flat, that's rather an advantage than otherwise. But where are you going, Miss Vane? because, wherever it is, I'd better see you there. If we stand before this book-stall any longer, the proprietor may think we're going to buy something, and as the Parisians don't seem a buying people, the delusion might be too much for his nerves. Where shall I take you, Miss Vane?"

"To the Rue l'Archevêque, if you please, behind the Madeleine. Do you know it?"

"Better than I know myself, Miss V. The Signora lived in that direction when I was a boy. But how is it that you are all alone in the streets at this time of night?"

"Papa had an appointment with two gentlemen, and he —"

"And he left you to walk home alone. Then he still —"

"Still what, Richard?"

The young man had stopped hesitatingly, and looking furtively at Eleanor.

"He still stays out late at night sometimes: a bad habit, Miss Vane. I was in hopes he would have been cured of it by this time; especially as there are no dens in the Palais Royal now-a-days; to the honour and glory of Napoleon the Third be it spoken."

"No dens in the Palais Royal," cried Eleanor. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing, my dear Miss Nelly, except that Paris used to be a very wild and wicked place."

"But it isn't now?"

"Oh dear, no. Our modern Lutetia is a very paradise of innocent delights, whose citizens enjoy themselves virtuously under the sheltering dictatorialism of a paternal government. You don't understand me — well, never mind, you are still the bright-faced child you were in the King's Road, Chelsea, only taller and prettier — that's all."

Miss Vane had taken her companion's arm, and they were walking away towards the Madeleine by this time; the young lady clinging to her new friend almost as confidingly as she had done to her father.

I don't think the confidence was misplaced. This young man, with the loud voice and the somewhat reckless manner, was only assistant scene-painter and second violin player at a transpontine theatre. He was bound by no tie of relationship to the beautiful

girl hanging upon his arm. Indeed, his acquaintance with Mr. Vane and his daughter had been of that accidental and desultory kind out of which the friendships of poor people generally arise.

The young man had lodged with his aunt in the same house that for nearly six years had sheltered the proud old spendthrift and his motherless child, and some of Eleanor's earliest memories were of Signora Piccirillo and her nephew Richard Thornton. She had received her first lessons upon the pianoforte from the kind Signora, whose Neapolitan husband had died years and years before, leaving her nothing but an Italian name, which looked very imposing at the top of the circulars which the music-mistress was wont to distribute amongst her pupils.

Richard Thornton, at eight-and-twenty, seemed a very elderly person in the eyes of the school-girl of fifteen. She could remember him years, and years, and years ago, as it seemed to her, sitting in his shirt sleeves through the long summer afternoons, under the shadow of the scarlet runners in the little garden at Chelsea, smoking dirty clay pipes and practising popular melodies upon his fiddle. Her father had thought him a nuisance, and had been lofty and reserved in his patronage of the young man; but to Eleanor, Dick had been the most delightful of play-fellows, the wisest of counsellors, the most learned of instructors. Whatever Richard did, Miss Vane insisted upon also doing, humbly following the genius she admired, with little toddling steps, along the brilliant pathway his talents adorned.

I am afraid she had learned to play "God save the Queen," and "Rory O'More," upon Richard's violin.

before she had mastered Haydn's "Surprise," or "Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman?" upon the Signora's shabby old grand piano. She smeared her pinafores with poor Dick's water-colours, and insisted upon producing replicas of the young scene-painter's sketches, with all the houses lop-sided, and the trunks of all the trees gouty. If Dick kept rabbits or silkworms, there was no greater happiness for Miss Vane than to accompany him to Covent Garden Market in quest of cabbage or mulberry leaves. I do not mean that she ever deserted her father for the society of her friend; but there were times when Mr. Vane absented himself from his little girl; long days, in which the old man strolled about the streets of the West-end, on the look-out for the men he had known in his prosperity, with the hope of borrowing a pound or two, or a handful of loose silver, for the love of Auld Lang Syne; and longer nights, in which he disappeared from the Chelsea lodging for many dreary hours.

Then it was that Eleanor Vane was thrown into the companionship of the Signora and her nephew. Then it was that she read Richard's books and periodicals, that she revelled in "Jack Sheppard," and gloated over "Wagner, the Wehr Wolf." Then it was that she played upon the young man's violin, and copied his pictures, and destroyed his water-colours, and gorged his rabbits and silkworms, and loved and tormented, and admired him, after the manner of some beautiful younger sister, who had dropped from the clouds to be his companion.

This is how these two stood towards each other. They had not met for three years until to-night; and in the interim Miss Eleanor Vane had grown from

a hoyden of twelve into a tall, slender damsel of fifteen.

"You are so altered, Miss Vane," Richard said, as they walked along the boulevard, "that I can't help wondering how it was I knew you."

"And you're not altered a bit, Dick," answered the young lady, "but don't call me Miss Vane — it sounds as if you were laughing at me. Call me Nell, as you used to do, at Chelsea. Do you know, Dick, I contrived to go to Chelsea once last summer. It was against papa's wish, you know, that I should let them find out where I came from at Brixton; because, you see, Chelsea, or at least the King's Road, sounds vulgar, papa thought. Indeed, I believe he said he lived in Cadogan Place, when the Miss Bennetts asked him the question. He explained it to me afterwards, you know, poor dear; and it wasn't exactly a story, for he had lodged there for a fortnight once, just after his marriage with mamma, and when he was beginning to get poor. So I was obliged to manage so cleverly to get to Regent's Gardens, Dick; and when I did get there you were gone, and the Signora's rooms were to let, and there was a nasty cross old woman in our lodgings, and the scarlet runners in the garden were so neglected, and I saw your rabbit-hutches, all broken and forgotten in the corner by the dust-hole, but the rabbits were gone. The dear old place seemed so changed, Dick, though Mr. and Mrs. Migson were very kind, and very pleased to see me, but they couldn't tell me where you and the Signora were living."

"No, we moved two or three times after leaving Regent's Gardens. You see we're obliged to study the pupils, Nell, rather than our own convenience.

Chelsea was a long way from the Waterloo Phoenix, in spite of the short cuts; but wherever the Signora's pupils are thickest we're obliged to pitch our tents. They're thickest about Tottenham-court Road and Euston Square way now: so we're living in the Pilasters, Dudley Street."

"The Pilasters! That sounds quite grand, Dick."

"Yes, doesn't it? *Magnifique et pas cher*. We've a chimney-sweep next door but one, and no end of mangles. The Pilasters would be very nice, if we'd two sides of the way, but unfortunately we haven't; the other side's stables. It isn't my prejudices make me object to that; but the grooms make such an abominable noise cleaning down their horses, and I wake every morning out of a dream in which it's Boxing-night, and my transformation scene is getting the goose."

The young man laughed cheerily, and guided his companion across the road to the other side of the boulevard. It was past ten o'clock when they reached the corner of the Rue l'Archevêque, and the butcher's shop was closed.

Eleanor knew that she had only to push open the little side door, and that she would find the key of her father's rooms in the custody of the butcher's wife. She was very tired, almost ready to drop, poor girl, for she had walked a long way since alighting at the Palais Royal with her father; but she was almost sorry that she had reached her destination. The sense of her loneliness returned, now that she was to part with her old friend.

"Thank you very much for seeing me home, Dick," she said, shaking hands with the young scene-

painter. "It was very selfish of me to bring you so far out of your way."

"Selfish of you! Why, don't you suppose I'd let you prowling about the streets by yourself, Nell?"

Eleanor's face flushed as her friend said this: there was a reproach to her father implied in the speech.

"It was my own fault that I was so late," she said. "It was only just nine when papa left me; but I loitered a little, looking at the shops. I shall see you again, Dick, I hope. But of course I shall, for you'll come and see papa, won't you? How long do you stay in Paris?"

"About a week, I suppose. I've a week's leave of absence, and double salary, besides my expenses. They know the value of a clever man at the Phoenix, Miss Vane."

"And where are you staying, Dick?"

"At the Hôtel des Deux Mondes, near the markets. I've an apartment in convenient proximity to the sky, if I want to study atmospheric effects. And so you live here, Nell?"

"Yes, those are our windows."

Eleanor pointed to the open sashes of the entresol: the fluffy worsted curtains were drawn, but the windows were wide open.

"And you expect your papa home —"

"At eleven o'clock at the latest," she said.

Richard Thornton sighed. He remembered Mr. Vane's habits, and he remembered that the little girl in pinafores had been wont to keep abnormal hours in her long watches for her father's coming. He had often found her, on his return from the transpontine theatre at one or two o'clock, with the door of the little sitting-room ajar, waiting patiently for the old man's coming.

"You won't sit up for your papa, Nell," he said, as he shook hands with her.

"Oh, no, papa told me not to sit up."

"Good night, then. You look tired, Nell. I'll call to-morrow, and I'll take you to the theatre, if your papa will let you go, and you shall see 'Raoul l'Empoisonneur.' Such a scene, Nell, in the seventh act. The stage divided into eight compartments, with eight different actions going on simultaneously, and five murders before the fall of the curtain. It's a great piece, and ought to make Spavin and Cromshaw's fortune."

"And yours, Dick."

"Oh, yes. Cromshaw will shake me by the hand in that delightful, gentlemanly manner of his: and Spavin — why Spavin will give me a five-pound note for my adaptation of 'Raoul,' and tell every member of the company, in confidence, that all the great scenes have been written in by him, and that the piece was utter rubbish till he reconstructed it."

"Poor Richard!"

"Yes, Nell, poorer than the gentleman who wrote the almanack, I dare say. But never mind, Nell. I don't think the game of life pays for much expenditure in the way of illumination. I think the wisest people are those who take existence easily. Spavin's wealth can't give him anything better than diamond studs and a phaeton. The virtuous peasant, Nell, who can slap his chest, and defy his enemies to pick a hole in his green baize jerkin, gets the best of it in the long run, I dare say."

"But I wish you were rich, Dick, for the Signora's sake," Eleanor said, gently.

"So do I, Nelly. I wish I was lessee of the

Phoenix, and I'd bring you out as Juliet, with new palace arches for the ball-room, and a lime-light in the balcony scene. But, good night, my dear; I mustn't keep you standing here, like this, though parting is such sweet sorrow, that I really shouldn't have the heart to go away to-night if I didn't mean to call to-morrow. That line's rather longer than the original, Nell, isn't it?"

Eleanor Vane laughed heartily at her old friend's random talk, as she wished him good night. All the light-heartedness of her careless childhood seemed to return to her in Richard Thornton's society. Her childhood had not been an unhappy one, remember; for in all her father's troubles, he had contrived to keep his head above water, somehow or other, and the influence of his over-sanguine spirit had kept Eleanor bright and hopeful under every temporary cloud in the domestic sky.

But she felt very desolate and lonely as she pushed open the door and entered the dark passage at the side of the shop. The butcher's wife came out at the sound of her footstep, and gave her the key, with some kindly word of greeting which Eleanor scarcely understood.

She could only say, "Bon soir, madame," in her school-girl French, as she dragged herself slowly up the little winding stair, thoroughly worn out, physical and mentally, by this time.

The little entresol seemed terribly close and stifling. She drew back the curtains, and looked out through the open window; but even the street itself seemed oppressively hot in the moonless, airless August night.

Eleanor found half a wax candle in a flat china

candlestick, and a box of matches, set ready for her. She lighted this candle, and then flung off her bonnet and mantle, before she sat down near the window.

"I shall have a very short time to wait, if papa comes home at eleven o'clock," she thought.

Alas! she remembered in her old childish experiences, that he had *never* come home at the promised hour. How often, ah, how often, she had waited, counting the weary hours upon the church clocks, — there was one which chimed the quarters; and trembling sometimes at those strange sounds which break the night silence of every house. How often she had "hoped against hope," that he might, for this once, return at the time he had promised.

She took the candle in her hand and looked about for a book. She wanted to while away the dreary interval which she knew must elapse before her father's return. She found a novel of Paul Féval's in a dirty and tattered cover, on the little marble-topped writing-table. The leaves were crumpled, and smeared with stains and splotches of grease, for it was Mr. Vane's habit to amuse himself with a work of fiction while he took his matutinal roll and coffee. He had taken to novel reading in his frivolous old age, and was as fond of a sentimental story as any school-girl, — as his daughter herself.

Miss Vane drew the lumbering little table to the open window, and sat down before it, with her candle close to her elbow, and the tattered book spread out before her. No breath of air flickered the flame of her candle, or ruffled the golden hair swept back from her brow.

The passers-by upon the opposite side of the street — they were few and far between by this time —

looked up at the lighted window, and saw a pretty picture by the dim glimmer of that solitary candle. The picture of a girl, serene in her youth and innocence, bending over her book: her pale muslin dress and auburn hair faintly visible in the subdued light.

The rattle of wheels and the cries of coachmen sounded far off upon the Boulevard, and in the Rue di Rivoli, and only made the silence more palpable in the Rue de l'Archevêque. Now and then a carriage came into that quiet corner, and Eleanor Vane looked up from her book, breathless, eager, expectant, fondly hoping that her father might have come back to her in some hired vehicle: but the solitary carriage always rolled away, until the sound of its wheels mixed with the rattle of the distant wheels upon the Boulevards.

There were clocks in the distance that struck the quarters. How long those quarters seemed! Paul Féval was very interesting no doubt. There was an awful mystery in those greasy tattered pages: a ghastly mystery about two drowned young women, treacherously made away with, as it seemed, upon the shore of a dreary river overshadowed by willows. There were villains and rascals paramount throughout this delightful romance; and there was mystery and murder enough for half a dozen novels. But Eleanor's thoughts wandered away from the page. The dreary river-bank, and the ghostly pollard-willows, the drowned young women, and the ubiquitous villain, all mingled themselves with her anxious thoughts about her father; and the trouble in the book seemed to become a part of the trouble in her own mind, adding its dismal weight to her anxieties.

There were splotchy engravings scattered here and

there through the pages of Monsieur Féval's romance, and Eleanor fancied by-and-by that the villain in these pictures was like the sulky stranger who had followed her father and the Frenchman away towards the Barrière Saint Antoine.

She fancied this, although she had scarcely seen that silent stranger's face. He had kept it, as it seemed, purposely averted, and she had only caught one glimpse of the restless black eyes under the shadow of his hat, and the thick moustache that shrouded his mouth. There is always something mysterious and unpleasant in the idea of anything that has been hidden from us, however trivial and insignificant that thing may be. Eleanor Vane, growing more and more nervous as the slow hours crept away, began to worry herself with the vivid recollection of that one brief glimpse in which she had seen the silent stranger's face.

"He cannot have a good countenance," she thought, "or the recollection of it would not make me so uncomfortable. How rude he was, too! I did not much like the Frenchman, but at least he was polite. The other man was very disagreeable. I hope he is not a friend of papa's." And then she returned to the drowned young women, and the water-side, and the willows; trying in vain to bury herself in the romance, and not to listen so eagerly for the striking of the quarters. Sometimes she thought, "before I turn over to the next page, papa will be home," or, "Before I can finish this chapter I shall hear his step upon the stairs."

Breathless though the night was, there were many sounds that disturbed and mocked this anxious watcher. Sometimes the door below shook — as if by some mysterious agency, there being no wind — and Elea-

nor fancied that her father's hand was on the latch. Sometimes the stairs creaked, and she started from her chair, eager to run and receive him, and firmly believing that he was stealing stealthily up to his apartments, anxious not to disturb the sleeping inmates of the house. She had known his cautious footfall sound exactly thus in her old midnight watches.

But all these sounds were only miserable delusions. Quarter after quarter, each quarter longer than the last, hour after hour, struck from the clocks distant and near. The rattling of the wheels upon the Boulevards had died gradually away, and at last had ceased altogether.

It was long past four, and Eleanor had pushed aside her book. It was daylight, — grey, cold, morning, chill and dismal after the oppressive August night, and she stood now in the window watching the empty street.

But still the quarters chimed from the distant clocks: those distant chimes had become terribly distinct now in the early morning stillness. But the silence was not of long duration. The rumble of wagon wheels sounded far away in the Rue St. Honoré. The rush and clatter of a detachment of cavalry clashed upon the asphalte of the Place de la Concorde. The early sound of a horn called out some wretched recruits to perform their morning exercise in the courtyards of the Louvre. The cheerful voices of work-people echoed in the streets; dogs were barking, birds singing, the yellow sun mounting in a cloudless heaven.

But there were no signs of the coming of George Vane with the morning sunlight; and as the day grew older and brighter, the anxious face of the pale watcher at the open window only grew paler and more anxious.

CHAPTER VI.

The Black Building by the River.

RICHARD THORNTON was by no means an early riser. He was generally one of the last of those gentlemen who shuffled into the orchestra at the ten o'clock rehearsal of a new melodrama, in which all the effect of a murder or an abduction depended upon the pizzicato twittering of violins, and the introduction of explosive chords at particular crises in the action of the piece. Mr. Thornton was a sluggard, who complained most bitterly of the heartlessness of stage-managers and prompter's minions, who seemed to take a malicious delight in nailing cruel slips of paper to the door-post of the Phoenix; terrible mandates, wherein the Full Band was called at ten; "no ten minutes;" the meaning of this last mysterious clause being that the ten minutes' grace which is usually accorded to the tardy performer shall on this occasion be cut off and done away with.

But Richard was out for a holiday now. The eyes of Messrs. Spavin and Cromshaw would fain have followed him in his Parisian wanderings, to see that he did double work for his double wage; but the proprietors of the Royal Waterloo Phoenix not being blest with the gift of clairvoyance, Mr. Thornton defied and snapped his fingers at them, secure in the consciousness of his own value.

"If J. T. Jumballs, the author of all the original dramas they have done at the Phoenix for the last ten

years, understood French, he'd do 'Raoul' for two pound ten," thought Richard, as he stood before his looking-glass in the blazing August sunshine, rubbing his chin contemplatively and wondering whether the bristles would be too strong if he let them stop till another morning.

If the honest truth is to be recorded, it must be acknowledged that Mr. Thornton was by no means too scrupulous in the performance of his toilet. He had a habit of forgetting to shave until his chin was covered by an appearance of red stubble, dappled here and there by patches of blue and brown, for his beard was wont to crop up in unexpected hues, which surprised even himself. He sympathised with the great lexicographer in not having any overstrained partiality for clean linen, and, indeed, usually wore a coloured shirt, the bosom of which was arabesqued with stray splashes of whitewash and distemper, to say nothing of occasional meandering evidences of the numerous pints of porter imbibed by the young artist during his day's labour. When Mr. Thornton bought a new suit of clothes he put them on, and wore them continuously; and ate and drank and painted in them until they were so worn and frayed, and enfeebled by ill treatment, that they began to drop away from him in rusty fragments like the withered leaves which fall from a sturdy young oak. There were people who declared that Mr. Thornton slept in his ordinary costume; but of course this was a cruel slander.

To walk eight or nine miles a-day to and fro between the place of your abode and the scene of your occupation; to paint the best part of the scenery for a large theatre in which new pieces are brought out

pretty frequently; to play second fiddle, and attend early rehearsals upon cold mornings; to jot down the music cues in a melodrama, or accompany Mr. Grigsby in his new comic song, or Madame Resalbini in her latest cachuca; and to adapt a French drama, now and then, by way of adding a few extra pounds to your income, is not exactly to lead an idle life: so perhaps poor Richard Thornton may be forgiven if his friends had occasion to laugh at his indifference upon the subject of soap and water. They even went so far as to call him "Dirty Dick," in their more facetious moments; but I don't think the obnoxious soubriquet wounded Richard's feelings. Everybody liked him and respected him as a generous-hearted, genial-tempered, honourable-minded fellow, who would scarcely have told a lie to save his life, and who scorned to drink a pint of beer that he couldn't pay for, or to accept a favour which he didn't mean to return.

People at the Phoenix knew that Richard Thornton's father had been a gentleman, and that the young man had a certain pride of his own. He was the only man in the theatre who neither abused nor flattered his employers. The carpenters and gasmen touched their caps when they talked to him, though he was shabbier than any of those *employés*; the little ballet girls were fond of him, and came to tell him their troubles when the cruel stage-manager had put their names down for shilling fines in a horrible book which was to be seen on the treasury table every Saturday morning. The old cleaners of the theatre told Mr. Thornton about their rheumatic knee-joints, and came to him for sympathy after dreary hours of scouring. He had patience with and compassion for every one. People knew that

he was kind and tender-hearted; for his pencil initials always appeared in some obscure corner of every subscription list, against a sum which was bulky when taken in relation to the amount of his salary. People knew that he was brave, for he had once threatened to fling Mr. Spavin into the pit when that gentleman had made some insinuation impeaching Richard's honour as to the unfair use of gold-leaf in the Enchanted Caves of Azure Deep. They knew that he was dutiful, and kind, and true to the old music-mistress with whom he lived, and whom he helped to support. They knew that when other men made light of sacred things, and were witty and philosophical upon very solemn subjects, Richard Thornton would leave the assembly gravely and quietly, how eloquent or lively soever he might have been before. People knew all this, and were respectful to the young scene-painter, in spite of the rainbow smears of paint upon his shabby coat, and the occasional fringe of mud upon the frayed edges of his trousers.

Upon this August morning Mr. Thornton made very short work of his toilet.

"I won't go out to breakfast," he thought, "though I can get two courses and a dessert in the Palais Royal, to say nothing of half a bottle of sour claret, for fifteen pence. I'll get some coffee and rolls, and go to work at some of the scenes for 'Raoul.'"

He rang a bell near his bed, pushed a table to the window which looked out into the quadrangle of the hotel, and sat down with a battered tin box of water-colours and a few squares of Bristol board before him. He had to ring several times before one of the waiters condescended to answer his summons, but he worked

away cheerily, smoking as he worked, at a careful water-coloured copy of a rough pencil-sketch which he had made a couple of nights before in the pit of the theatre.

He didn't leave off to eat his breakfast when it came, by-and-bye; but ate his rolls and drank his coffee in the pauses of his work, only laying down his brush for a minute or so at a time. The scene was a street in old Paris, the houses very dark and brown, with over-hanging latticed windows, exterior staircases, practicable bridges, and all sorts of devices which called for the employment of a great deal of glue and pasteboard in Richard's model. This scene was only one out of eight, and the young scene-painter wanted to take perfect models of all the eight scenes back to the Phoenix. He had M. Michel Lévy's sixty centimes edition of the new play spread open before him, and referred to it now and again as he painted.

"Humph! Enter *Raoul* down staircase in flat. *Raoul's* a doctor, and the house with the staircase is his. The house at the corner belongs to *Gobemouche*, the comic barber, and the practicable lattice is *Madelaine's*. She'll come to her window by-and-bye to talk to the doctor, whom she thinks a very excellent man; though he's been giving her mild doses of *aqua tofana* for the last three weeks. *Catherine de Medicis* comes over the practicable bridge, presently, disguised as a nun. I wonder how many melodramas poor *Catherine* has appeared in since she left this mortal stage? Did she ever do anything except poison people, I wonder, while she was alive? She never does anything else at the Porte Saint Martin, or on the Surrey side of the Thames. I must sketch the costumes, by-

and-bye. *Raoul* in black velvet and scarlet hose, a pointed beard, straight eye-brows, short black hair, — austere and dignified. Cromshaw will do *Raoul*, of course; and Spavin will play the light-comedy soldier who gets drunk, and tears off *Catherine's* velvet mask in the last scene. Yes, that'll be a great scene on our side of the water. *Charles the Ninth* — he's a muff, so anybody can play him — has just finished reading the arsenicated edition of a treatise on hawking, closes the last page of the book, feels the first spasm. *Catherine*, disguised as a nun, has been followed by Spavin — by the comedy-soldier, I mean — to the Louvre, after a conversation having been overheard between her and *Raoul*. The *King*, in the agonies of spasmodic affection, asks who has murdered him. 'That woman — that sorceress — that fiend in human form!' cries the soldier, snatching the mask from *Catherine's* face. — 'Merciful heaven, it is my mother!' shrieks the *King*, falling dead with a final spasm. That 'it is my mother!' ought to be good for three rounds of applause, at least. I dare say Spavin will have the speech transferred from the *King's* part to his own. 'Merciful Heaven, it is *his* mother!' would do just as well."

Poor Richard Thornton, not having risen very early, worked on till past five o'clock in the afternoon before his model was finished. He got up with a sigh of relief when the pasteboard presentment of the old Parisian street stood out upon the little table, square and perfect.

He filled his pipe and walked up and down before the table, smoking and admiring his work in an innocent rapture.

"Poor Nelly," he thought presently. "I promised I would call in the Rue l'Archevêque to-day, to pay my respects to the old chap. Not that he'd particularly care to see me, I dare say, but Nell is such a darling. If she asked me to stand on my head, and do poor old Goffie's gnome-fly business, I think I should try and do it. However, it is too late to call upon Mr. Vandeleur Vane to-day, so I must put that off till to-morrow. I must drop in again at half-price at the Porte Saint Martin, to have another look at the scene in eight compartments. That'll be rather a poser for the machinist at the Phoenix, I flatter myself. Yes, I must have one more look at it, and — Ah! by-the-bye, there's the Morgue!"

Mr. Thornton finished his pipe and rubbed his chin with a reflective air.

"Yes, I must have a look at the Morgue before I go," he thought; "I promised that old nuisance J. T. Jumballs that I'd refresh my memory about the Morgue. He's doing a great drama in which one half of the *dramatis personæ* recognise the other half dead on the marble slabs. He's never been across the channel, and I think his notions of the Morgue are somewhat foggy. He fancies it's about as big as Westminster Abbey, I know, and he wants the governors to give him the whole depth of the stage for his great scene, and set it obliquely, like the Assyrian hall in 'Sardanapalus,' so as to give the idea of illimitable extent. I'm to paint the scene for him. '*The interior of the Morgue by lamp-light. The meeting of the living and the dead.*' That'll be rather a strong line for the bill, at any rate. I'll go and have some dinner in the Palais Royal, and then go down and have a look at the gloomy place. An

exterior wouldn't be bad, with Notre Dame in the distance, but an *interior* — Bah! J. T. J. is a clever fellow, but I wish his genius didn't lie so much in the charnel-house."

He put on his hat, left his room, locked the door, and ran down the polished staircase whistling merrily as he went. He was glad to be released from his work, pleased at the prospect of a few hours' idleness in the foreign city. Many people, inhabitants and visitors, thought Paris dull, dreary, and deserted in this hot August weather, but it was a delightful change from the Pilasters and the primeval solitudes of Northumberland Square, that quaint, grim, quadrangle of big houses, whose prim middle-class inhabitants looked coldly over their smart wire window-blinds at poor Richard's shabby coat.

Mr. Thornton got an excellent dinner at a great bustling restaurateur's in the Palais Royal, where for two francs one might dine on all the delicacies of the season, in a splendid saloon, enlivened by the martial braying of a brass band in the garden below.

The *carte du jour* almost bewildered Richard by its extent and grandeur, and he chose hap-hazard from the catalogue of soups which the obliging waiter gabbled over for his instruction. He read all the pleasing by-laws touching the non-division of dinners, and the admissibility of exchanges in the way of a dish for a dessert, or a dessert for a dish, by payment of a few extra centimes. He saw that almost all the diners hid themselves behind great wedges of orange-coloured melon at an early stage of the banquet, and generally wound up with a small white washing-basin of lobster salad, the preparation of which was a matter of slow

and solemn care and thought. He ordered his dinner in humble imitation of these accomplished *habitués*, and got very good value for his two francs. Then he paid his money, bowed to the graceful lady who sat in splendid attire in a very bower of salads and desserts, and went down a broad staircase that led into a street behind the Palais Royal, and thence to the Rue Richelieu.

He treated himself to a cup of coffee and a cigar at a café in the Place de la Bourse, and then strolled slowly away towards the Seine, smoking, and dawdling to look at this and that as he walked along. It was nearly eight o'clock therefore when he emerged, from some narrow street, upon the quay, and made his way towards that bridge beneath whose shadow the Morgue hides, like some foul and unhallowed thing. He did not much like the task which Mr. Jumballs had imposed upon him, but he was too good-natured to refuse compliance with the transpontine dramatist's desire, and far too conscientious to break a promise once made, however disagreeable the performance of that promise might prove.

He walked on resolutely, therefore, towards the black, shed-like building.

"I hope that there are no bodies there to-night," he thought. "One glance round the place will show me all I want to see. I hope there are no poor dead creatures there to-night."

He stopped before going in, and looked at a couple of women who were standing near, chattering together with no little gesticulation.

He asked one of these women the question, Were there any bodies in the Morgue?

Yes, — the women both answered with one voice. There had not long been brought the body of a gentleman, an officer it was thought, poisoned in a gaming-house. A murder, perhaps, or a suicide; no one knew which.

Richard Thornton shrugged his shoulders as he turned away from the idle gossips.

"Some people would call me a coward if they knew how I dislike going into this place," he thought.

He threw away his cigar, took off his hat, and slowly crossed the dark threshold of the Parisian dead-house.

When he came out again, which was not until after the lapse of at least a quarter of an hour, his face was almost as white as the face of the corpse he had left within. He went upon the bridge, scarcely knowing where he went, and walking like a man who walks in his sleep.

Not more than half a dozen yards from the Morgue he came suddenly upon the lonely figure of a girl, whose arm rested on the parapet of the bridge and whose pale face was turned towards the towers of Notre Dame.

She looked up as he approached, and called him by his name.

"*You* here, Eleanor," he cried. "Come away, child; come away, for pity's sake!"

CHAPTER VII.

Suspense.

ELEANOR VANE and the scene-painter stood upon the bridge looking at each other for a few moments after Richard's cry of mingled horror and astonishment.

Had not Eleanor's mind been entirely absorbed by one cruel anxiety, she would have wondered at her old friend's strange greeting. As it was she took no heed of his manner. The shadows of the summer night were gathering over the city and upon the quiet river; the towers of Notre Dame loomed dimly through the twilight.

"Oh, Richard!" Eleanor cried, "I have been so unhappy. Papa didn't come home all last night, nor yet to-day. I waited for him hour after hour until late in the afternoon; and then the house seemed unbearable; I *couldn't* stay in any longer, and I came out to look for him. I have been far up on the Boulevard where I parted with him last night, and all the way along the crowded streets about there: and then through other streets, till I found myself down here by the water, and I'm so tired. Oh, Dick, Dick, how unkind of papa not to come home. How unkind of my darling father to give me this misery."

She clasped her hands convulsively upon her companion's arm, and bending her head, burst into tears. Those tears were the first which she had shed in all her trouble; the first relief after long hours of agonising suspense, of weary watching.

"Oh, how can papa treat me so?" she cried, amid her sobbing. "How can he treat me so?"

Then, suddenly raising her head, she looked at Richard Thornton, her clear grey eyes dilated with a wild terror, which gave her face a strange and awful beauty.

"Richard!" she cried; "Richard! you don't think that there — that there is — anything wrong — that anything has happened to my father?"

She did not wait for him to answer, but cried out directly, as if shrinking in terror from the awful suggestion in her own words: —

"What should happen to him? he is so well and strong, poor darling. If he is old, he is not *like* an old man, you know. The people of the house in the Rue de l'Archevêque have been very kind to me; they say I am quite foolish to be frightened, and they told me that papa stopped out all night once last summer. He went to Versailles to see some friends, and stayed away all night without giving any notice that he was going to do so. I know it's very silly of me to be so frightened, Richard. But I always was frightened at Chelsea if he stayed out. I used to fancy all sorts of things. I thought of all kinds of dreadful things last night, Dick, and to-day; until my fancies almost drove me mad."

During all this time the scene-painter had not spoken. He seemed unable to offer any word of comfort to the poor girl who clung to him in her distress, looking to him for consolation and hope.

She looked wonderingly into his face puzzled by his silence, which seemed unfeeling; and it was not like Richard to be unfeeling.

"Richard!" she cried, almost impatiently. "Richard,

“speak to me! You see how much misery I’ve suffered, and you don’t say a word! You’ll help me to find papa, won’t you?”

The young man looked down at her. Heaven knows she would have seen no lack of tenderness or compassion in his face, if it had not been hidden by the gathering gloom of the August evening. He drew her hand through his arm, and led her away towards the other side of the water, leaving the black roof of the dead-house behind him.

“There is nothing I would not do to help you, Eleanor,” he said, gently. “God knows my heart, my dear; and He knows how faithfully I will try to help you.”

“And you will look for papa, Richard, if he should not come home to-night — he may be at home now, you know, and he may be angry with me for coming out alone, instead of waiting quietly till he returned; but if he should not come to-night, you’ll look for him, won’t you, Richard? You’ll search all Paris till you find him?”

“I’ll do everything that I could do for you if I were your brother, Eleanor,” the young man answered gravely; “there are times in our lives when nobody but God can help us, my dear, and when we must turn to Him. It’s in the day of trouble that we want His help, Nelly.”

“Yes, yes, I know. I prayed, last night; again and again, and again, that papa might come back soon. I have been saying the same prayer all to-day, Richard; even just now, when you found me standing by the parapet of the bridge, I was praying for my dear father. I saw the church towers looking so grand and solemn in the twilight, and the sight of them made me re-

member how powerful God is, and that He can always grant our prayers."

"If it seems best and wisest in his sight, Nell."

"Yes, of course; sometimes we pray for foolish things, but there could be nothing foolish in wishing my darling father to come back to me. Where are you taking me, Dick?"

Eleanor stopped suddenly, and looked at her companion. She had need to ask the question, for Richard Thornton was leading her into a labyrinth of streets in the direction of the Luxembourg, and seemed to have very little notion whither he was going.

"This is not the way home, Richard," Eleanor said; "I don't know where we are, but we seem to be going further and further away from home. Will you take me back to the Rue de l'Archevêque, Dick? We must cross the river again, you know, to get there. I want to go home at once. Papa may have come home, and he'll be angry, perhaps, if he finds me absent. Take me home, Dick."

"I will, my dear. We'll cross the water further on, by the Louvre; and now tell me, Eleanor — I — I can't very well make inquiries about your father, unless I fully understand the circumstances under which you parted from him last night. How was it, my dear? What happened when Mr. Vane left you upon the Boulevard?"

They were walking in a broad, quiet street in which there were very few passers-by. The houses stood back behind ponderous gates, and were hidden by sheltering walls. The stately mansions between court and garden had rather a decayed aspect, which gave a certain dreariness to their grandeur. The

fashionable world seemed to have deserted this quiet quarter for the leafy avenues leading away from the Champs Elysées.

Richard and Eleanor walked slowly along the broad footway. The stillness of the soft summer night had some effect upon the school-girl's fever of impatience. The grave, compassionate tones of her friend's voice soothed her. The burst of passionate weeping which had almost convulsed her slight frame half an hour before, had been an unspeakable relief to her. She clung to her companion's arm confidently, and walked patiently by his side; without questioning him as to where he was leading her, though she had a vague idea that he was not taking her homewards.

"I will not be foolish about papa," she said; "I will do as you tell me, Richard; I will trust in God. I am sure my dear father will return to me. We are so fond of each other; you know, Richard, we are all the world to each other; and my poor darling looks so hopefully forward to the day in which he will have Mr. de Crespigny's fortune. I don't hope for that quite so much as papa does, Dick; for Mr. de Crespigny may live to be a very, very old man, and it seems so wicked to wish for any one's death. The day I look forward to is the day when I shall have finished my education, and be able to work for papa. That must be almost better than being rich, I should think, Dick. I can't imagine any happier fate than to work for those we love."

Her face brightened as she talked, and she turned to her companion, looking to him for sympathy; but Richard's head was averted, and he seemed to be

staring absently at the houses upon the opposite side of the way.

He was silent for some moments after Eleanor had left off speaking; and then he said, rather abruptly:

"Tell me, my dear, how did you part with your father last night?"

"Why, we had been dining on the Boulevard; and after dinner, papa took me for a long walk, ever so far, past all the theatres, and he had promised to take me to the Ambigu or the Porte Saint Martin; but as we were coming back we met two gentlemen, friends of papa's, who stopped him and said they had an appointment with him, and persuaded him to go back with them."

"Back with them! Back where?"

"I mean back towards a big stone gateway we had passed a little time before. I only know they turned that way, but I don't know where they went. I stood and watched them till they were out of sight."

"And the two men, what were they like?"

"One of them was a little Frenchman, stout and rosy-faced, with a light moustache and beard like the Emperor's. He was smartly dressed, and had a cane, which he kept twirling when he talked to papa."

"Did you hear what he said?"

"No, he spoke in a low voice, and he talked French."

"But you speak French, Eleanor?"

"Yes, but not as they speak it here. The people seem to talk so fast here, it's quite difficult to understand them."

"But the other man, Nell; what was he like?"

"Oh, he was a disagreeable-looking man, and

seemed to have a sulky manner, as if he was offended with papa for breaking his appointment, and didn't care how the matter ended. I scarcely saw his face, at least only for a moment, just long enough to see that he had black eyes, and a thick black moustache. He was tall, and shabbily dressed, and I fancied he was an Englishman though he never once spoke."

"He never spoke! It was the Frenchman, then, who persuaded your father to go away with him?"

"Yes."

"And he seemed very anxious?"

"Oh, yes, very anxious."

Richard Thornton muttered something between his set teeth, something which sounded like a curse.

"Tell me one thing, Eleanor," he said. "Your poor father never was too well off, I know. He could not be likely to have much money about him last night. Do you know if he had any?"

"Yes, he had a great deal of money."

"What do you mean by a great deal? A few pounds, I suppose?"

"Oh, much more than that," Eleanor answered. "He had a hundred pounds — a hundred pounds in new bank notes, French notes. It was the money my half-sister, Mrs. Bannister, had sent him, to pay for my education at Madame Marly's."

"Mrs. Bannister," said Richard, catching at the name. "Ah, to be sure, I remember now. Mrs. Bannister is your sister. She is very well off, is she not, and has been kind to you? If you were in any trouble, you would go to her, I suppose, Eleanor?"

"Go to her if I were in trouble! Oh, no, no, Dick, not for the world!"

"But why not? She has been kind to you, hasn't she, Nell?"

"Oh, yes, very kind in paying money for my education, and all that; but you know, Richard, there are some people who seem to do kind things in an unkind manner. If you knew the cruel letter that Mrs. Bannister wrote to papa — the cruel, humiliating things she said only a few days ago, you couldn't wonder that I don't like her."

"But she is your sister, Nell; your nearest relation."

"Except papa."

"And she ought to love you, and be kind to you. She lives at Bayswater, I think I've heard you say?"

"Yes, in Hyde Park Gardens."

"To be sure. Mrs. Bannister, Hyde Park Gardens, Bayswater."

He repeated the name and address, as if he wished to impress them upon his memory.

"I will take you home now, Nell," he said. "My poor child, you must be tired to death."

"How can I think about being tired, Richard," exclaimed Eleanor, "when I am so anxious about papa? Oh, if I only find him at home, what happiness it will be!"

But she hung heavily upon her friend's arm, and Richard knew that she was very tired. She had been wandering about Paris for several hours, poor child, hither and thither, in the long, unfamiliar streets, following all sorts of unlikely people who looked in the distance something like her father; hoping again and again, only again and again to be disappointed.

They turned into a wider thoroughfare presently,

and the scene-painter called the first hackney vehicle which passed him, and lifted Eleanor into it. She was almost fainting with fatigue and exhaustion.

"What have you had to eat to-day, Nell?" he asked.

She hesitated a little, as if she had forgotten what she had eaten, or indeed whether she had eaten at all.

"There was some coffee and a couple of rolls sent for papa this morning. He has his breakfast sent him from a *traiteur's*, you know. I had one of the rolls."

"And you've had nothing since?"

"No. How could I eat when I was so wretched about papa?"

Richard shook his head reproachfully.

"My darling Nell!" he said, "you promised me just now that you'd be a good girl, and trust in Providence. I shall take you somewhere and give you some supper, and then you must promise me to go home and get a good night's rest."

"I will do whatever you tell me, Richard," Eleanor answered, submissively, "but let me go home first, please, and see if papa has come back."

The scene-painter did not for a few moments reply to this request, but he answered presently in an abstracted tone.

"You shall do what you like, Nell."

He told the coachman to drive to the Rue de l'Archevêque, but he would not let Eleanor alight from the vehicle when they reached the corner of the street and the little butcher's shop, eager as she was to spring out and run into the house.

"Stay where you are, Nell," he said, authoritatively. "I will make all inquiries."

Eleanor obeyed him. She was exhausted by a weary night of watching, a long day of agitation and anxiety, and she was too weak to oppose her old friend. She looked hopelessly up at the open windows on the entresol. They were exactly as she had left them four or five hours ago. No glimmer of light gave friendly token that the rooms were occupied.

Richard Thornton talked to the butcher's wife for a long time, as it seemed to Eleanor; but he had very little to tell her when he came back to the carriage. Mr. Vane had not returned: that was all he said.

He took his companion to a café near the Madeleine, where he insisted upon her taking a large cup of coffee and a roll. It was all he could persuade her to take, and she begged to be allowed to sit at one of the tables outside the café.

She might see her father go by, she said, on his way to the Rue de l'Archevêque.

The two friends sat at a little iron table rather apart from the groups of animated loungers sitting at other tables drinking coffee and lemonade. But George Mowbray Vandeleur Vane did not pass that way throughout the half hour during which Eleanor lingered over her cup of coffee.

It was past ten o'clock when Richard Thornton bade her good night at the threshold of the little door beside the butcher's shop.

"You must promise me not to sit up to-night, Nelly," he said, as he shook hands with her.

"Yes, Richard."

"And mind you keep your promise this time. I

will come and see you early to-morrow. God bless you, my dear, and good night."

He pressed her hand tenderly. When she had closed the door behind her, he crossed the narrow street, and waited upon the other side of the way until he saw a light in one of the entresol windows. He watched while Eleanor came to this window and drew a dark curtain across it, and then he walked slowly away.

"God bless her, poor child," he murmured, in a low, compassionate voice, "poor lonely child!"

The grave thoughtfulness of his expression never changed as he walked homewards to the Hôtel des Deux Mondes. Late as it was when he reached his chamber on the fifth storey, he seated himself at the table, and pushing aside his clay pipe and tobacco-pouch, his water-colours and brushes, his broken palettes and scraps of Bristol board, and all the litter of his day's work, he took a few sheets of foreign letter paper and a bottle of ink from a shabby leather desk, and began to write.

He wrote two letters, both rather long, and folded, sealed, and directed them.

One was addressed to Mrs. Bannister, Hyde Park Gardens, Bayswater; the other to Signora Picirillo, the Pilasters, Dudley Street, Northumberland Square.

Richard Thornton put both these letters in his pocket and went out to post them.

"I think I have acted for the best," he muttered, as he went back to the hotel near the market-place; "I can do nothing more until to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

Good Samaritans.

GEORGE VANE did not come home. Eleanor kept the promise made to her faithful friend, and tried to sleep. She flung herself, dressed as she was, upon the little bed near the curtained alcove. She would thus be ready to run to her father, whenever he came in, she thought, to welcome and minister to him. She was thoroughly worn out, and she slept; a wretched slumber, broken by nightmares and horrible dreams, in which she saw her father assailed by all kinds of dangers, a prey to every manner of misfortune and vicissitude. Once she saw him standing on a horrible rock, menaced by a swiftly advancing tide, while she was in a boat only a few paces from him, as it seemed, doing battle with the black waves, and striving with all her might to reach and rescue him, but never able to do so.

In another dream he was wandering upon the crumbling verge of a precipice — he seemed a white-haired, feeble, tottering old man in this vision — and again she was near him, but unable to give him warning of his danger, though a word would have done so. The agony of her endeavour to utter the one cry which would have called that idolised father from his death, awoke her.

But she had other dreams, dreams of quite a different character, in which her father was restored to her, rich and prosperous, and he and she were laugh-

ing merrily at all the foolish tortures she had inflicted upon herself; and other dreams again, which seemed so real that she fancied she must be awake; dreams in which she heard the welcome footsteps upon the stair, the opening of the door, and her father's voice in the next room calling to her.

These dreams were the worst of all. It was terrible to awake after many such delusions and find she had been again deluded. It was cruel to awake to the full sense of her loneliness, while the sound of the voice she had heard in her dream still lingered in her ears.

The dark hours of the short summer night seemed interminable to her in this wretched, bewildered, half-sleeping, half-waking state; even longer than they had appeared when she sat up watching for her father's return. Every fresh dream was a slow agony of terror and perplexity.

At last the grey daylight stole in through the half-closed shutters, the vague outlines of the furniture grew out of the darkness; duskily impalpable and ghastly at first, then sharp and distinct in the cold morning light. She could not rest any longer; she got up and went to the window; she pushed the sash open, and sank down on her knees with her forehead resting on the window sill.

"I will wait for him here," she thought. "I shall hear his step in the street. Poor dear, poor dear, I can guess why he stays away. He has spent that odious money, and does not like to return and tell me so. My darling father, do you know me so little as to think that I would grudge you the last farthing I had in the world, if you wanted it?"

Her thoughts rambled on in strange confusion until they grew bewildering; her brain became dizzy with perpetual repetitions of the same idea; when she lifted her head — her poor, weary, burning, heavy head, which seemed a leaden weight that it was almost impossible to raise — and looked from the window, the street below reeled beneath her eyes, the floor upon which she knelt seemed sinking with her into some deep gulf of blackness and horror. A thousand conflicting sounds—not the morning noises of the waking city — hissed and buzzed, and roared and thundered in her ears, growing louder and louder and louder, until they all melted away in the fast-gathering darkness.

The sun was shining brightly into the room when the compassionate mistress of the house found Mr. Vane's daughter half-kneeling, half lying on the ground, with her head upon the cold sill of the open window, and her auburn hair streaming in draggled curls about her shoulders. Her thin muslin frock was wet with the early dew. She had fainted away, and had lain thus, helpless and insensible, for several hours.

The butcher's wife undressed her and put her to bed. Richard Thornton came to the Rue de l'Archevêque half an hour afterwards, and went away again directly to look for an English doctor. He found one, an elderly man with grave and gentle manners, who declared that Miss Vane was suffering from fever brought on by intense mental excitement: she was of a highly nervous temperament, he said, and that she required little to be done for her; she only wanted

repose and quiet. Her constitution was superb, and would triumph over a far more serious attack than this.

Richard Thornton took the doctor into the adjoining room, the little sitting-room which bore the traces of Mr. Vane's occupation, and talked to him in a low voice for some minutes. The medical man shook his head gravely.

"It is very sad," he said; "it will be better to tell her the truth, if possible, as soon as she recovers from the delirium. The anxiety and suspense have overtaxed her brain. Anything would be better than that this overstrained state of the mind should continue. Her constitution will rally after a shock; but with her highly nervous and imaginative nature, everything is to be dreaded from prolonged mental irritation. She is related to you, I suppose?"

"No, poor child! I wish she were."

"But she is not without near relatives, I hope?"

"No, she has sisters — or at least half-sisters — and brothers."

"They should be written to, then, immediately," the doctor said, as he took up his hat.

"I have written to one of her sisters, and I have written to another lady, a friend, who will be of more use, I fancy, in this crisis."

The doctor went away, promising to send some saline draughts to keep the fever under, and to call again in the evening.

Richard Thornton went into the little bed-chamber where the butcher's wife sat beside the curtained alcove, making up some accounts in a leather-covered book. She was a hearty pleasant-mannered young

woman, and had taken up her post by the invalid's bed very willingly, although her presence was always much needed in the shop below.

"*Chut*," she whispered, with her finger on her lip, "she sleeps, *pauvrette*!"

Richard sat down quietly by the open window. He took out Michel Lévy's edition of "*Raoul*," a stump of lead pencil, and the back of an old letter, and set to work resolutely at his adaptation. He could not afford to lose time, even though his adopted sister lay ill under the shadow of the worsted curtains that shrouded the alcove on the other side of the little room.

He sat long and patiently, turning the Poison drama into English with wonderful ease and rapidity; and meekly bearing a deprivation that was no small one to him, in the loss of his clay pipe, which he was in the habit of smoking at all hours of the day.

Eleanor awoke at last, and began talking in a rambling, incoherent way about her father, and the money sent by Mrs. Bannister, and the parting upon the Boulevard.

The butcher's wife drew back the curtain, and Richard Thornton went to the bedside and looked down tenderly at his childish friend.

Her golden-tinted hair was scattered on the pillow, tangled and roughened by the constant movement of her restless head. Her grey eyes were feverishly bright, and burning spots blazed upon the cheeks which had been so deadly pale on the previous night. She knew Richard, and spoke to him; but the delirium was not over, for she mixed the events of the present with the Chelsea experiences of long ago, and talked to her old friend of the signora, the violin, and the rabbits. She

fell off into a heavy sleep again, after taking the effervescent medicine sent her by the English surgeon, and slept until nearly twilight. In these long slumbers her fresh and powerful constitution asserted itself, and took compensation for the strain that had been made upon it in the past day or two.

Richard went away in the afternoon, and did not return till late at night, when the butcher's wife told him that her charge had been very restless, and had asked repeatedly for her father.

"What are we to do?" the good woman said, shrugging her shoulders with a despairing gesture. "Are we to tell her?"

"Not yet," Richard answered. "Keep her quiet; keep her as quiet as you can. And if it is positively necessary to tell her anything, say that her father has been taken ill, away from home, and cannot be brought back yet. Poor child! it seems so cruel to keep her in suspense, and still more cruel to deceive her."

The butcher's wife promised to do all in her power to keep her patient quiet. The doctor had sent an opiate. Miss Vane could not sleep too much, he said.

So another night passed, this time very peacefully for Eleanor, who lay in a heavy slumber broken by no cruel dreams. She was very, very weak the next day, for she had scarcely eaten anything since the roll and coffee which Richard had made her take; and though she was not exactly delirious, her mind seemed almost incapable of receiving any very vivid impression. She listened quietly when they told her that her father could not come home because he was ill.

Richard Thornton came to the Rue de l'Archevêque several times during this second day of Eleanor's ill-

ness, but he only stayed a few minutes upon each occasion. He had a great deal to do, he told the butcher's wife, who still kept faithfully to her post in the sick-room, only stealing away now and then, while Eleanor was asleep, to attend to her business.

It was past eleven o'clock that night when the scene-painter came for the last time. Eleanor had grown worse as the evening advanced, and was by this time terribly feverish and restless. She wanted to get up and dress herself, and go to her father. If he was ill, how could they keep her from him, how could they be so cruel as to keep her from his side?

Then, starting up suddenly from her pillow, she would cry out wildly that they were deceiving her, and that her father was dead.

But help and comfort was near at hand. When Richard came he did not come alone. He brought a lady with him; an elderly, grey-headed woman, dressed in shabby black.

When this lady appeared upon the threshold of the dimly lighted little bedchamber, Eleanor Vane suddenly sprang up in her bed, and threw out her arms with a wild cry of surprise and delight.

"The Signora!" she exclaimed, "the dear, kind Signora!"

The lady took off her bonnet, and then went close up to the bed, and seating herself on the edge of the mattress, drew Eleanor's fair head upon her bosom, smoothing the tangled hair with unspeakable tenderness.

"My poor child!" she murmured again, and again. "My poor, poor child!"

"But, dear Signora," Eleanor cried, wonderingly,

"how is it that you are here? Why didn't Richard tell me that you were in Paris?"

"Because I have only just arrived, my darling."

"Only just arrived! Only just arrived in Paris! But why did you come?"

"I came to see you, Eleanor," the Signora answered, very gently. "I heard that you were in trouble, my dear, and I have come to you; to help and comfort you if I can."

The butcher's wife had withdrawn into the little sitting-room where Richard sat in the darkness. Eleanor Vane and the Signora were therefore quite alone.

Hitherto the invalid's head had rested very quietly upon her friend's bosom, but now she lifted it suddenly and looked full in the Signora's face.

"You came to me because I was in trouble," she said. "How should I be in trouble so long as my father lives? What sorrow can come to me while he is safe? He is ill, they say, but he will get better; he will get better, won't he? He will be better soon, dear Signora; he will be better soon?"

She waited for an answer to her breathless questioning, looking intently in the pale quiet face of her friend; then suddenly, with a low, wailing cry, she flung up her hands and clasped them wildly above her head.

"You have all deceived me," she cried, "you have all deceived me: my father is dead!"

The Signora drew her arm caressingly round Eleanor Vane, and tried to shelter the poor burning head once more upon her shoulder; but Eleanor shrank from her with an impatient gesture, and, with her hands

still clasped above her head, stared blankly at the dead wall before her.

"My dear, my dear," the Signora said, trying to unclasp the rigid hands which were so convulsively clasped together. "Eleanor, my dear, listen to me; for pity's sake try and listen to me, my own dear love. You must know, you must have long known, my dear, that heavy sorrows come to us all, sooner or later. It is the common lot, my love, and we must all bow before the Divine hand that afflicts us. If there were no sorrow in this world, Eleanor, we should grow too much in love with our own happiness; we should be frightened at the approach of grey hairs and old age; we should tremble at the thought of death. If there were no better and higher life than this, Eleanor, sorrow and death would indeed be terrible. You know how very much affliction has fallen to my share, dear. You have heard me speak of the children I loved; all taken from me, Nelly, all taken away. If it were not for my dear nephew, Richard, I should stand quite alone in the world, a desolate old woman, with no hope on this side of the grave. But when my sons were taken from me, God raised me up another son in him. Do you think that God ever abandons us, Eleanor, even when he afflicts us most heavily? I have lived a long life, my dear, and I tell you no!"

The Signora waited in vain for some change in the rigid attitude, the stony face. Eleanor Vane still stared blankly at the dead wall before her.

"You have all deceived me," she repeated; "my father is dead!"

It was useless talking to her; the tenderest words were dull and meaningless jargon to her ears. That

night the fever grew worse, and the delirium was at its height. The butcher's wife was relieved by a very patient and accustomed watcher, for the Signora had sat by many sick-beds, hoping against hope, until despair crept into her heart, as the grey shadows of approaching death came over a beloved face, never again to pass away.

The fever lasted for several days and nights, but throughout every change the English doctor declared that Eleanor Vane's constitution would carry her through a worse attack than this.

"I am glad you told her," he said one morning to the Signora, "there will be less to tell her by-and-bye, when she begins to get strong again."

There was, therefore, something more to be told.

Little by little the fever passed away; the crimson spots faded out of the invalid's hollow cheeks; the unnatural lustre of the grey eyes grew less and less vivid; little by little the mind grew clearer, the delirious wanderings less frequent.

But with the return of perfect consciousness there came terrible bursts of grief — grief that was loud and passionate in proportion to the impulsive vehemence of Eleanor Vane's character. This was her first sorrow, and she could not bear it quietly. Floods of tears drowned her pillow night after night; she refused to be comforted; she repulsed the patient Signora; she would not listen to poor Richard, who came sometimes to sit by her side, and tried his best to beguile her from her grief. She rebelled against their attempted consolation.

"What was my father to you?" she cried, pas-

sionately. "You can afford to forget him. He was all the world to me!"

But it was not in Eleanor's nature to be long ungrateful for the tenderness and compassion of those who were so patient with her in this dark hour of her young life.

"How good you are to me," she cried sometimes, "and what a wretch I am to think so little of your goodness. But you don't know how I loved my father. You don't know — you don't know. I was to have worked for him; I was to have worked for him by-and-bye, and we were to have led such a happy life together."

She was growing strong again in spite of her grief. Her elastic temperament asserted itself in spite of her sorrow, which she never ceased to think of night and day, and she arose after her illness like a beautiful flower which had been beaten and crushed by the storm.

Richard Thornton's leave of absence had expired for some days, but the Royal Phœnix Theatre closed its doors in the hot summer months, and he was therefore comparatively free. He stayed in Paris with his aunt, for they were both bent upon one purpose, to be accomplished at any sacrifice to themselves. Thank Heaven! there are always good Samaritans in the world, who do not mind turning backward upon their life's journey when there is a desolate and wounded traveller in need of their help and tenderness.

The Parisian atmosphere was cooling down in the early days of September — faint but refreshing breezes were beginning to blow away the white mists of summer heat upon the boulevards, when Eleanor Vane was

well enough to sit in the little saloon above the butcher's shop, and drink tea in the English fashion with her two friends.

She was well enough to do this, and Richard and the Signora were beginning to think of turning homewards; but before they could well leave Paris there was something that ought to be told to Eleanor — something that she *must* know sooner or later — something that it would be perhaps better for her to know at once.

But they had waited from time to time, thinking that she might ask some question which would lead to the revelation that must ultimately be made to her.

Upon this September afternoon she sat near the open window, looking very beautiful and virginal in a loose white muslin dressing-gown, and with her long auburn curls falling upon her shoulders. She had been silent for a long time: her two companions watching her furtively, observant of every change in her countenance. Her cup of tea stood untasted on a little table at her side, and she was sitting with her hands loosely locked together in her lap.

She spoke at last, and asked that very question which must inevitably lead to the revelation her friends had to make to her.

"You have never told me how papa died," she said; "his death must have been sudden. I know."

Eleanor Vane spoke very quietly. She had never before mentioned her dead father with so little outward evidence of emotion. The hands loosely locked together upon her lap stirred with a slightly tremulous motion; the face, turned towards the Signora and Ri-

chard Thornton, had a look of fixed intensity; and that was all.

"Papa died suddenly, did he not?" she repeated.

"Yes, my dear, very suddenly."

"I thought so. But why was he not brought home? Why couldn't I see —"

— She stopped abruptly, and turned her face away towards the open window. She was trembling violently now from head to foot.

Her two companions were silent. That terrible something which was as yet unrevealed must be told sooner or later; but who was to tell it to this girl, with her excitable nature, her highly wrought nervous temperament?

The Signora shrugged her shoulders despondingly, as she looked at her nephew. Mr. Thornton had been painting all the afternoon in the little sitting-room. He had tried to interest Eleanor Vane in the great set scenes he was preparing for *Raoul*. He had explained to her the nature of a vampire trap in the wainscot of the poisoner's chamber, and had made his pasteboard model limp in his repeated exhibition of its machinery. The vampire trap was a subtle contrivance which might have beguiled any one from their grief, Dick thought; but the wan smile with which Eleanor watched his work only made the scene-painter's heart ache. Richard sighed as he returned his aunt's look. It seemed quite a hopeless case as yet. This poor lonely child of fifteen might go melancholy mad, perhaps, in her grief for a spendthrift father.

Eleanor Vane turned upon them suddenly while they sat silent and embarrassed, wondering what they should say to her next.

"My father committed suicide!" she said, in a strangely quiet voice.

The Signora started and rose suddenly, as if she would have gone to Eleanor. Richard grew very pale, but sat looking down at the litter upon the table, with one hand trifling nervously amongst the scraps of cardboard and wet paint-brushes.

"Yes," cried Eleanor Vane, "you have deceived me from first to last. You told me first that he was not dead; but when you could no longer keep my misery a secret from me, you only told me half the truth — you only told me half the cruel truth. And even now, when I have suffered so much that it seems as if no further suffering could touch me, you still deceive me, you still try to keep the truth from me. My father parted from me in health and spirits. Don't trifle with me, Signora; I am not a child any longer, I am not a foolish school-girl, whom you can deceive as you like. I am a woman, and will know the worst. My father killed himself!"

She had risen in her excitement, but clung with one hand to the back of her chair, as if too weak to stand without that support.

The Signora went to her, and wound her arms about the slight trembling figure; but Eleanor seemed almost unconscious of that motherly caress.

"Tell me the truth," she cried vehemently, "did my father kill himself?"

"It is feared that he did, Eleanor."

The pale face grew a shade whiter, and the trembling frame became suddenly rigid.

"It is feared that he did!" Eleanor Vane repeated. "It is not certain then?"

The Signora was silent.

"Why don't you tell me the truth?" cried the girl, passionately. "Do you think you can make my misery less to me by dropping out your words one by one? Tell me the worst. What can there be worse than my father's death; his unhappy death; killed by his own hand, his poor desperate hand? Tell me the truth. If you don't wish me to go mad, tell me the truth at once."

"I will, Eleanor, I will," the Signora answered gently. "I wish to tell you all. I wish that you should know the truth, sad as it may be to hear. This is the great sorrow of your life, my dear, and it has fallen upon you very early. I hope you will try and bear it like a Christian."

Eleanor Vane shook her head with an impatient gesture.

"Don't talk to me of my sorrow," she cried, "what does it matter what I suffer? My father, my poor father, what must he have suffered before he did this dreadful act? Don't talk about me; tell me of him, and tell me the worst."

"I will, my darling, I will; but sit down, sit down, and try to compose yourself."

"No, I'll stand here till you have told me the truth. I'll not stir from this spot till I know all."

She disengaged herself from the Signora's supporting arm, and with her hand still resting on the chair, stood resolute before the old music-mistress and her nephew. I think the Signora and the scene-painter were both afraid of her, she looked so grand in her beauty and despair.

She seemed indeed, as she had said, no longer a

child or a school-girl; but a woman, desperate and almost terrible in the intensity of her despair.

"Let me tell Eleanor the truth of this sad story," Richard said, "it may be told very briefly. When your father parted with you, Nelly, on the night of the 11th of August, he and the two men who were with him went at once to an obscure café in one of the streets near the Barrière Saint Antoine. They were in the habit of going there, it seems, sometimes playing billiards in the large open room on the ground floor, sometimes playing cards in a *cabinet particulier* on the entresol. Upon this night they went straight to the private room. It was about half-past nine when they went in. The waiter who attended upon them took them three bottles of Chambertin and a good deal of seltzer-water. Your father seemed in high spirits at first. He and the dark Englishman were playing *écarté*, their usual game; and the Frenchman was looking over your father's hand, now and then advising his play, now and then applauding and encouraging him. All this came out upon inquiry. The Frenchman quitted the café at a little before twelve; your father and the young Englishman stayed till long after midnight, and towards one o'clock they were heard at high words, and almost immediately afterwards the Englishman went away, leaving your father, who sent the waiter for some brandy and writing materials. He wanted to write a letter before he left, he said."

The scene-painter paused, looking anxiously at the face of his listener. The rigid intensity of that pale young face had undergone no change; the grey eyes, fixed and dilated, were turned steadily towards him.

"When the waiter took your father the things he

had asked for, he found him sitting at the table with his face hidden in his hands. The man placed the brandy and writing materials upon the table, and then went away, but not before he had noticed a strange faint smell — the smell of some drug, he thought; but he had no idea then what drug. The waiter went down stairs; all the ordinary frequenters of the place were gone, and the lights were out. The man waited up to let your father out, expecting him to come down stairs every moment. Three o'clock struck, and the waiter went up stairs upon the pretence of asking if anything was wanted. He found your father sitting very much as he had left him, except that this time his head was resting upon the table, which was scattered with torn scraps of paper. He was dead, Eleanor. The man gave the alarm directly, and a doctor came to give assistance, if any could have been given; but the drug which the waiter had smelt was opium, and your father had taken a quantity which would have killed the strongest man in Paris."

"Why did he do this?"

"I can scarcely tell you, my dear; but your poor father left, among the scraps of paper upon the table, one fragment much larger and more intelligible than the rest. It is evidently part of a letter addressed to you; but it is very wildly and incoherently worded; and you must remember that it was written under circumstances of great mental excitement."

"Give it me!"

Eleanor stretched out her hand with an authoritative gesture. Richard hesitated.

"I wish you to fully understand the nature of this letter before you read it, Eleanor; I wish —"

"You kept the story of my father's death from me out of mistaken kindness," the girl said, in an unfaltering voice; "I will try and remember how good you have been to me, so that I may forgive you that; but you cannot keep from me the letter my father wrote to me before he died. That is mine; and I claim it."

"Let her see it, poor child," said the Signora.

Richard Thornton took a leather memorandumbook from one of the pockets of his loose coat. There were several papers in this book. He selected one, and handed it silently to Eleanor Vane. It was a sheet of letter-paper, written upon in her father's hand, but a part of it had been torn away.

Even had the whole of the letter been left, the writer's style was so wild and incoherent that it would have been no easy task to understand his meaning. In its torn and fragmentary state, this scrap of writing left by George Vane was only a scribble of confused and broken sentences. The sheet of paper had been torn from the top to the bottom, so that the end of each line was missing. The following broken lines were therefore all that Eleanor could decipher, and in these the words were blotted and indistinct.

MY POOR ELEANOR, — My poor injured
worst your cruel sister, Hortensia Bannis
could not be bad enough. I am a thief
robbed and cheated my own
been decoyed to this hell upon earth
wretches who are base enough to
a helpless old man who had trust
to be gentlemen. I cannot return
look in my child's face aft

money which was to have
education. Better to die and rid
But my blood be upon the head of
who has cheated me this night out of
May he suffer as he has
forget, Eleanor, never forget Robert Lan
murderer of your helpless old
a cheat and a villain who
some day live to revenge the fate
poor old father, who prays that God will
helpless old man whose folly
madness have

There was no more. These lines were spread over the first leaf of a sheet of letter-paper; the second leaf, as well as a long strip of the first, had been torn away.

This was the only clue to the secret of his death which George Vane had left behind him.

Eleanor Vane folded the crumpled scrap of paper, and put it tenderly in her bosom. Then, falling on her knees, she clasped her hands, and lifted them towards the low ceiling of the little chamber.

"Oh, my God!" she cried; "hear the vow of a desolate creature, who has only one purpose left in life."

Signora Picirillo knelt down beside her, and tried to clasp her in her arms.

"My dear, my dear!" she pleaded; "remember how this letter was written — remember the state of your father's mind—"

"I remember nothing," answered Eleanor Vane, "except that my father tells me to revenge his murder. For he was murdered," she cried, passionately, "if this

money — this wretched money, which he would have died sooner than lose — was taken from him unfairly. He was murdered. What did the wretch who robbed him care what became of the poor, broken-hearted, helpless old man whom he had wronged and cheated? What did he care? He left my father; left him in his desolation and misery; left him after having stripped and beggared him; left him to die in his despair. Listen to me, both of you, and remember what I say. I am very young, I know, but I have learnt to think and act for myself before to-day. I don't know this man's name; I never even saw his face; I don't know who he is, or where he comes from; but sooner or later I swear to be revenged upon him for my father's cruel death."

"Eleanor, Eleanor!" cried the Signora: "is this womanly? Is this Christian-like?"

The girl turned upon her. There was almost a supernatural light, now, in the dilated grey eyes. Eleanor Vane had risen from her knees, and stood with her slender figure drawn to its fullest height, her long auburn hair streaming over her shoulders, with the low light of the setting sun shining upon the waving tresses until they glittered like molten gold. She looked, in her desperate resolution and virginal beauty, like some young martyr of the middle ages waiting to be led to the rack.

"I don't know whether it is womanly or Christian-like," she said, "but I know that it is henceforward the purpose of my life, and that it is stronger than myself."

CHAPTER IX.

Looking to the Future.

THE story which Richard Thornton had told Eleanor Vane was the simple record of an unhappy truth. The gay and thoughtless spendthrift, the man about town, who had outlived his age and spent three fortunes, had ended his life, by his own desperate hand, in an obscure *café* near the Barrière Saint Antoine.

Amongst other habits of the age in which George Vane had lived, gambling was pretty prevalent. Mr. Vane's sanguine nature, was the very nature which leads a man to the gaming-table, and holds him there under the demoniac fascination of the fatal green cloth, hoping against hope, until his pockets are empty, and he must needs crawl dispirited away, having no more money to lose.

This was the one vice of George Vane's life. He had tried to redeem his every-day extravagances by the gamester's frenzied speculations, the gamester's subtle combinations; which are so infallible in theory, so ruinous in practice. Eleanor had never known this. If her father stayed out late at night, and she had to wait and watch for him through long weary hours of suspense and anxiety, she never knew why he stayed, or why he was often so broken down and wretched when he came home. Other people could guess the reason of the old man's midnight absences from his shabby lodging, but they were too merciful to tell his little girl the truth. In Paris, in a strange city, where

his acquaintance were few, the old vice grew stronger, and George Vane spent his nights in gambling for pitiful stakes in any low haunts to which his disreputable associates deluded him. He picked up strange acquaintance in these days of his decadence, as poor people very often do: young men who were wandering about the world, penniless adventurers, professionless young reprobates, getting a very doubtful living by the exercise of their wits; men who were content to flatter and pay court to the old beau so long as they could win a few francs from him to pay for the evening's diversion.

With such men George Vane had associated for a long time. They won pitiful sums of him, and cheated him without scruple; but his life was a very dull one, remember; he had lived for the world, and society of some kind or other was absolutely necessary to him. He clung, therefore, to these men, and was fain to accept their homage in the hour of his decline; and it was with such men as these he had spent the night before his death. It was such men as these who had robbed him of the money which, but for an unhappy accident, would have been safely handed over to the schoolmistress in the Bois de Boulogne.

The old man's death caused very little excitement in Paris. Public gambling-houses had been abolished by the order of the Government long before; and it was no longer a common thing for desperate men to scatter their brains upon the table on which they had just squandered their money; but still people knew very well that there was plenty of card-playing, and dice-throwing, and billiard-playing, always going on here and there in the brilliant city, and the suicide of

a gambler more or less was not a thing to make any disturbance.

Mrs. Bannister wrote a stiffly-worded letter in reply to that in which Richard Thornton told her of her father's death, enclosing an order on Messrs. Blount for the sum she considered sufficient to pay for the old man's funeral, and to support Eleanor for a few weeks.

"I should advise her early return to England," the stockbroker's widow wrote, "and I will endeavour to find her some decent situation — as nursery governess or milliner's apprentice, perhaps — but she must remember that I expect her to support herself, and that she must not look to me for any further assistance. I have performed my duty to my father at a considerable loss to myself, but with his death all claim upon me ceases."

George Vane had been buried during the early days of his youngest daughter's illness. They placed him amongst a cluster of neglected graves, in a patch of ground upon the outskirts of Père la Chaise, a burial place for heretics and suicides, and Richard Thornton ordered a roughly hewn cross from one of the stone-masons near the cemetery. So, far away from the lofty monuments of the Russian princes and the marshals of the First Empire; far away from Abelard and Heloise, and all the marble chapels in which devoted survivors pray for the souls of the beloved dead; in a desolate and unhallowed patch of weedy turf, where the bones of the departed were only suffered to rest peaceably for a given number of years, and were stirred up out of their coffins periodically to make room for new-comers, George Vane slept the last sleep. He

might have been buried as a nameless suicide, but for the chance which had taken Richard Thornton to the Morgue, where he recognised Eleanor's father in the unknown dead man who had been last brought to that gloomy shelter; for he had had no papers which could give any clue to his identity about him at the time of his death.

Upon the morning after that quiet September afternoon on which Eleanor Vane had learned the true story of her father's death, Signora Picirillo for the first time spoke seriously of the future. In the intensity of her first great grief, Eleanor Vane had never once thought of the desolation of her position, nor yet of the sacrifices which the Signora and Richard were making for her sake. She never remembered that they were both lingering in Paris solely on her account; she only knew that they were there, and that she saw them daily, and that the sight of them, good and kind as they were, was pain and weariness to her, like the sight of everything else in the world. She had been singularly quiet since the revelation made to her. After the first burst of passionate vehemence which had succeeded her perusal of her dead father's letter, her manner had grown almost unnaturally calm. She had sat all the evening apart near the window, and Richard had tried in vain to beguile her attention even for a moment. She kept silence, brooding upon the scrap of paper which lay in her bosom.

This morning she sat in a listless attitude, with her head resting on her hand. She took no heed of the Signora's busy movements from room to room. She made no effort to give her old friend any assistance in all the little household arrangements which

took so long to complete, and when at last the music-mistress brought her needle-work to the window, and sat down opposite the invalid, Eleanor looked up at her with a dull gaze that struck despair to the good creature's heart.

"Nelly, my dear," the Signora said, briskly, "I want to have a little serious conversation with you."

"About what, dear Signora?"

"About the future, my love."

"The future!"

Eleanor Vane uttered the word almost as if it had been meaningless to her.

"Yes, my dear. You see even I can talk hopefully of the future, though I am an old woman; but you, who are only fifteen, have a long life before you, and it is time you began to look forward to it."

"I do look forward," Eleanor said, with a gloomy expression upon her face. "I do look forward to the future; and to meeting that man, the man who caused my father's death. How am I to find him, Signora? Help me in that. You have been kind to me in everything else. Only help me to do that and I will love you better than ever I have loved you yet."

The Signora shook her head. She was a light-hearted, energetic creature, who had borne very heavy burdens through a long life; but the burdens had not been able to crush her. Perhaps her unselfishness had upheld her throughout all her trials. She had thought and cared so much for other people, that she had had little time left for thinking of herself.

"My dear Eleanor," she said, gravely, "this will never do. You must not be influenced by that fatal letter. Your poor father had no right to lay the

responsibility of his own act upon another man. If he chose to stake this unfortunate money upon the hazard of a pack of cards, and lost it, he had no right to charge this man with the consequences of his own folly."

"But the man cheated him!"

"As your father thought. People are very apt to fancy themselves cheated when they lose money."

"Papa would never have written so positively, if he had not *known* that the man cheated him. Besides, Richard says they were heard at high words; that was no doubt when my poor dear father accused this wretch of being a cheat. He and his companion were wicked, scheming men, who had good reason to hide their names. They were pitiless wretches, who had no compassion upon the poor old man who trusted them and believed in their honour. Are *you* going to defend them, Signora Picirillo?"

"Defend them, Eleanor? no: they were bad men, I have no doubt. But, my darling child, you must not begin life with hatred and vengeance in your heart."

"Not hate the man who caused my father's death?" cried Eleanor Vane. "Do you think I shall ever cease to hate him, Signora? Do you think that I shall ever forget to pray that the day may come when he and I will stand face to face, and that he may be as helpless and as dependent upon my mercy as my father was on his? Heaven help him on that day! But I don't want to talk of this, Signora: what is the use of talking? I may be an old woman, perhaps, before I meet this man; but surely I shall meet him sooner or later. If I only knew his name — if I only knew his name, I think I could trace him from one end of the earth to the other. Robert Lan — Lan — what?"

Her head sank forward on her breast, and her eyes fixed themselves dreamily on the sunlit street below the open window. The French poodle, Fido, lay at her feet, and lifted up his head every now and then to lick her hand. The animal had missed its master, and had wandered about the little rooms, sniffing on the thresholds of closed doors, and moaning dismally for several days after Mr. Vane's disappearance.

The Signora sighed as she watched Eleanor. What was she to do with this girl, who had taken a horrible vendetta upon herself at fifteen years of age, and who seemed as gloomily absorbed in her scheme of vengeance as any Corsican chieftain?

"My dear," the music-mistress said presently, with rather a sharp accent, "do you know that Richard and I will be compelled to leave Paris to-morrow?"

"Leave Paris to-morrow, Signora!"

"Yes. The Phoenix opens early in October, and our Dick will have all the scenes to paint for the new piece. Besides, there are my pupils; you know, my love, they cannot be kept together for ever unless I go back to them."

Eleanor Vane looked up with almost a bewildered expression, as if she had been trying to comprehend all that Signora Picirillo had said; then suddenly a light seemed to dawn upon her, and she rose from the chair and flung herself upon a hassock at the feet of her friend.

"Dear Signora," she said, clasping the music-mistress's hand in both her own, "how wicked and ungrateful I have been all this time! I forget everything but myself and my own trouble. You came

over to Paris on my account. You told me so when I was ill, but I had forgotten, I had forgotten. And Richard has stopped in Paris because of me. Oh, what can I do to repay you both, what can I do?"

Eleanor hid her face upon the Signora's lap, and wept silently. Those tears did her good; they beguiled her for a little while, at least, from the one absorbing thought of her father's melancholy fate.

Signora Picirillo tenderly smoothed the soft ripples of auburn hair lying on her lap.

"My dear Eleanor, shall I tell you what you can do to make us both very happy, and to repay us tenfold for any little sacrifice we may have made on your account?"

"Yes, yes; tell me."

"You have to choose your pathway in life, Nelly, and to choose it quickly. In all the world you have only your half-sisters, and brothers to whom you can appeal for assistance. You have some claim upon them, you know, dear, but I sometimes think you are too proud to avail yourself of that claim."

Eleanor Vane lifted her head with a gesture of superb defiance.

"I would starve rather than accept a penny from Mrs. Bannister, or from her sister or brothers. If they had been different, my father would never have died as he did. He was deserted and abandoned by all the world, except his helpless child, who could do nothing to save him."

"But if you don't mean to apply to Mrs. Bannister, what will you do, Nelly?"

Eleanor Vane shook her head hopelessly. The whole fabric of the future had been shattered by her

father's desperate act. The simple dream of a life in which she was to have worked for that beloved father was over, and it seemed to Eleanor as if the future existed no longer: there was only the sad, desolate present, — a dreary spot in the great desert of life, bounded by a yawning grave.

"Why do you ask me what I mean to do, Signora?" she said piteously. "How does it matter what I do? Nothing I can do will bring my father back. I will stay in Paris, and get my living how I can, and look for the man who murdered my father."

"Eleanor," cried the Signora, "are you mad? How could you stay in Paris, when you don't know a single creature in the whole city? How, in mercy's name, could you get your living in this strange place?"

"I could be a nursery-governess; or a nursery-maid: anything! What do I care how low I sink, if I can only stay here, where I am likely to meet that man?"

"Eleanor, my dear! For pity's sake do not delude yourself in this manner. The man you want to find is an adventurer, no doubt. In Paris one day, in London another, or away in America perhaps, or at the furthest extremity of the globe. Do you hope to find this man by walking about the streets of Paris?"

"I don't know."

"How do you expect to meet him?"

"I don't know."

"But, Eleanor, be reasonable. It is utterly impossible that you can remain in Paris. If Mrs. Bannister does not claim the right of exercising some authority over you, I claim it as your oldest friend. My dear, you will not refuse to listen to me, will you?"

"No, no, dear Signora. If you think I mustn't stay in Paris, I'll go back to England, to the Miss Bennetts. They'll give me fifteen pounds a-year as junior teacher. I may as well live with them, if I mustn't stay here. I must earn some money, I suppose, before I can even try to find the man who caused my father's death. How long it will be before I can earn anything worth speaking of!"

She sighed wearily, and fell again into a gloomy silence, from which the poodle vainly tried to arouse her by many affectionate devices.

"Then we may consider it settled, Nelly, my dear," the Signora said, cheerfully. "You will leave Paris to-morrow morning, with Richard and me. You can stay with us, my dear, till you've made up your mind what to do. We've a little spare room, which is only used now as receptacle for empty boxes and Richard's painting litter. We'll fit it up for you, my darling, and make you as comfortable as we can."

"Dear, dear Signora!" said Eleanor, kneeling by her friend's chair. "How good you are to me. But while I have been ill there must have been a great deal of money spent: for the doctor, and the jelly, and fruit and lemonade you have given me — who found the money, Signora?"

"Your sister, Mrs. Bannister, my dear; she sent some money in answer to a letter from Richard."

Eleanor's face crimsoned suddenly, and the music-mistress understood the meaning of that angry flush.

"Richard didn't ask for any money, my love. He only wrote to tell your sister what had happened. She sent money for all necessary expenses. It is not all gone yet, Nelly; there will be enough to pay your

journey back to England; and even then something left. I have kept an account of all that has been spent, and will give it to you when you like."

Eleanor looked down at her white morning-gown.

"Is there enough left to buy a black frock?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, my darling. I have thought of that. I have had mourning made for you. The dress-maker took one of your muslin frocks for a pattern, so there was no occasion to trouble you about the business."

"How good you are to me, how very, very good!"

Eleanor Vane could only say this. As yet she only dimly felt how much she owed to these people, who were bound to her by no tie of relationship, and who yet stepped aside from their own difficult pathway to do her service in her sorrow. She could not learn to cling to them, and depend upon them yet. She had loved them long ago, in her father's lifetime, but now that he was dead, every link that had bound her to life, and love, and happiness, seemed suddenly severed, and she stood alone, groping blindly in the thick darkness of a new and dreary world, with only one light shining far away at the end of a wearisome and obscure pathway; and that a lurid and fatal star, which beckoned her onward to some unknown deed of hate and vengeance.

Heaven knows what vague scheme of retribution she cherished in her childish ignorance of the world. Perhaps she formed her ideas of life from the numerous novels she had read, in which the villain was always confounded in the last chapter, however triumphant he might be through two volumes and three-quarters of successful iniquity.

George Vane's sanguine and romantic visions of wealth and grandeur, of retaliation upon those who had neglected and forgotten him, had not been without effect upon the mind of his youngest daughter. That plastic mind had been entirely in the old man's hands, to mould in what form he pleased. Himself the slave of impulse, it was not to be supposed that he could teach his daughter those sound principles without which man, like a rudderless vessel, floats hither and thither before every current in the sea of life. He suffered Eleanor's impulsive nature to have full sway; he put no curb upon the sanguine temperament which took everything in the extreme. As blindly as the girl loved her father, so blindly she was ready to hate those whom he called his enemies. To investigate the nature of the wrongs they had done him would have been to take their side in the quarrel. Reason and Love could not go hand-in-hand in Eleanor's creed; for the questions which Reason might ask would be so many treacheries against Love.

It is not to be wondered, then, that she held the few broken sentences written by her father, on the threshold of a shameful death, as a solemn and sacred trust not to be violated or lost sight of, though her future life should be sacrificed to the fulfilment of one purpose.

Such thoughts as these, indistinct, ignorant, and childish, perhaps, but not the less absorbing, filled her mind. It may be that this new purpose of revenge enabled her the better to endure her loss. She had something to live for, at least. There was a light far away athwart the long gloomy pathway through an unknown world; and, however lurid that guiding star might be, it was better than total darkness.

CHAPTER X.

Hortensia Bannister holds out a Helping Hand.

SIGNORA PICIRILLO was very well contented with her morning's work. She had obtained Eleanor's consent to a speedy departure from Paris; that was the grand point. Once away from the scene of George Vane's death, the young girl's sunshiny nature would re-assert itself, and little by little the great grief would be forgotten.

In all this dreary period of sickness and misery the good music-mistress had grown to love Mr. Vane's daughter even more than she had loved her long ago, when Eleanor's childish fingers had first stumbled slowly over the keys of the pianoforte, in a feeble endeavour to master the grand difficulties of Haydn's "Surprise."

The widow's life had been a very sorrowful one. Perhaps its most tranquil period had come within the last ten years. It was ten years since, her Italian husband and her children having one by one died, she had found herself alone in the world, with a gaunt, long-legged hobadahoy of eighteen, her dead sister's orphan son, for her sole protector.

This long-legged hobadahoy was Richard Thornton, the only child of the Signora's pretty younger sister and a dashing cavalry officer, who had married a penniless and obscure girl for the love of her pretty face, and had died within a couple of years of his marriage, leaving his widow to drag out the remnant

of a fretful, helpless life in dependence upon her sister. The Signora had been used to carrying other people's burthens from a very early age. She was the eldest child of a clever violinist, for twenty years leader of the orchestra in one of the principal London theatres; and from babyhood she had been a brave-hearted, self-reliant creature. When her sister died, therefore, and with the last words upon her pale, tremulous lips prayed the Signora to protect the helpless boy, Richard Thornton, Eliza Picirillo freely accepted the charge, and promised to perform it faithfully. The poor faded beauty died with a smile upon her face, and when Signor Picirillo — who was a teacher of languages at a few suburban schools, and a lazy, good-tempered nonentity — came home that evening, he found that there was to be another member of his domestic circle, and another mouth to be fed henceforth.

The Signora's cruse of oil held out bravely, in spite of the demands upon it; and by-and-bye, when the honest-hearted music-mistress would otherwise have been terribly desolate, there was Richard, a tall lad, ready to stand by her sturdily in the battle of life, and as devoted to her as the most affectionate of sons. The boy had shown considerable talent at a very early age, but it was a versatile kind of talent which did not promise ever to burst forth into the grander gift of genius. His aunt taught him music, and he taught himself painting, intending to be something in the way of Maclise or Turner by-and-bye, and scraping together some of the shillings he earned with his violin in order to attend a dingy academy somewhere in Bloomsbury.

But the great historical subjects after Maclise — “The Death of the Bloody Boar at Bosworth,” a grand battle scene, with a lurid sunset in the background, and Richmond’s face and armour all ablaze with crimson lake and gamboge, from the flaming reflection of the skies, was the *magnum opus* which poor Dick fondly hoped to see in the Royal Academy — were not very saleable; and the Turner-esque landscapes, nymphs and ruins, dryads and satyrs, dimly visible through yellow mist and rose-coloured fog, cost a great deal of time and money to produce, and were not easily convertible into ready cash. So, when Richard had gone the usual weary round amongst the picture-dealers, and had endured the usual heart-burnings and agonies which wait upon ambitious youth, he was glad to accept the brush flung aside by a scene-painter at the Phoenix, where Dick received a scanty salary as second violinist; a salary which was doubled when the young man practised the double duty of second violin and assistant scene-painter.

These simple people were the only friends of Eleanor Vane’s childhood. They were ready to accept the responsibility of her future welfare now, when her rich sister would have sent her into the world, lonely and helpless, to sink to the abject drudgery which well-to-do people speak so complacently of, when they recommend their poor relations to get an honest living and trouble them no longer.

Richard Thornton was enraptured at the idea of taking this beautiful younger sister home with him, although that idea involved the necessity of working for her till she was able to do something for herself.

“Nothing could be better for us than all this sad

business, Aunty," the scene-painter said when he called in the Rue l'Archevêque, and found his aunt alone in the little sitting-room. Eleanor was lying down after the morning's excitement, while her friend packed her slender wardrobe and made all preparations for departure. "Nothing could be better for us," the young man said. "Why, Nell's golden hair will light up the Pilasters with perpetual sunshine, and I shall always have a model for my subject-pictures. Then what a companion she'll be for you in the long dreary nights when I am away at the Phoenix, and how capitally she'll be able to help you with your pupils; for, of course, she plays and sings, like anything, by this time."

"But she wants to go back to the people at the Brixton school, Dick."

"But, Lord bless you, Aunty, we won't let her go," cried Mr. Thornton; "we'll make a prima donna or a leading tragedy-actress, or something of that kind, of her. We'll teach her to make a hundred pounds a-week out of her white arms and her flashing gray eyes. How beautiful she looked last night when she was on her knees, vowing vengeance against that scoundrel who won her father's money. How splendid she looked with her yellow hair all streaming over her shoulders, and her eyes flashing sparks of fire! Wouldn't she bring the house down, if she did that at the Phoenix? She's a wonderful girl, aunty; the sort of girl to set all London in a blaze some day, somehow or other. Miss Bennett's and Brixton, indeed!" cried Richard, snapping his fingers contemptuously, "you could no more chain that girl down to a governess's drudgery, than you could make a flash of forked lightning do duty for a farthing candle."

So Eleanor Vane went back to England with her friends. They chose the Dieppe and Newhaven route for its economy; and over the same sunlit landscape upon which she had gazed so rapturously less than a month ago, Eleanor's eyes wandered now wearily and sadly, seeing nothing but desolation wherever they looked. She recognised swelling hills and broad patches of low verdure, winding glimpses of the river, far-away villages glimmering whitely in the distance, and she wondered at the change in herself which made all these things so different to her. What a child she had been a month ago; what a reckless, happy child, looking forward in foolish certainty to a long life with her father; ignorant of all sorrows except the petty troubles she had shared with him; ready to hope for anything in the boundless future; with a whole fairy-land of pleasure and delight spreading out before her eager feet!

Now she was a woman, alone in a horrible desert, over whose dreary sands she must toil slowly to the end she hoped to reach.

She sat back in a corner of the second-class carriage with her face hidden in a veil, and with the dog Fido curled up in her lap. Her father had been fond of the faithful creature, she remembered.

It was early in the gray bleakness of a September morning when the cab, carrying Eleanor and her friends, rattled under an archway leading out of Dudley Street, Bloomsbury, into the queer little retreat called the Pilasters. The grooms were already at work in the mews, and the neighbourhood was enlivened by that hissing noise with which horses are generally beguiled during the trials of the equine toilet. The chimney-

sweep had left his abode and was whooping dismally in Northumberland Square. Life began early in the Pilasters, and already the inmates of many houses were astir, and the sharp voices of mothers clamoured denunciations on the elder daughters who acted as unsalaried nursemaids to the younger branches of the family.

The place popularly known as the Pilasters is one of the queerest nooks in London. It consists of a row of tumble-down houses, fronted by a dilapidated colonnade, and filled with busy life from cellar to attic. But I do not believe that the inhabitants of the Pilasters are guilty of nefarious practices, or that vice and crime find a hiding-place in the cellars below the colonnade. The retreat stands by itself, hidden between two highly respectable middle-class streets, whose inhabitants would scarcely tolerate Alsatian habits or Field Lane proclivities in their near neighbours. Small tradesmen find a home in the Pilasters, and emerge thence to work for the best families in Dudley Street and "the Squares."

Here, amongst small tailors and mantua-makers, cheap eating-houses, shabby beer-shops, chimney-sweeps and mangles, Signora Picirillo had taken up her abode, bringing her faded goods and chattels, the remnants of brighter times, to furnish the first-floor over a shoemaker's shop. I am afraid the shoemaker was oftener employed in mending old shoes than in making new ones, but the Signora was fain to ignore that fact, and to be contented with her good fortune in having found a very cheap lodging in a central neighbourhood.

This was a shabbier place than any that Eleanor Vane had ever lived in, but she showed no distaste for

its simple arrangements. The Signora's hopes were realised by-and-bye. At first the girl sat all day in a despondent attitude, with the French poodle in her lap, her head drooping on her breast, her eyes fixed on vacancy, her whole manner giving evidence of an all-absorbing grief which was nearly akin to despair. She went to Brixton very soon after her return to England; but here a cruel disappointment awaited her. The Misses Bennett heard her sorrowful story with pitiful murmurs of regret and compassion; but they had engaged a young person as junior teacher, and could do nothing to help her. She returned to the Pilasters, looking the image of pale despair; but the Signora and Richard both declared to her that nothing could be happier for them than her consenting to remain with them.

So it seemed very much as if the Pilasters was to be Eleanor Vane's permanent abode. The neighbours had stared at her a great deal at first, admiring her pale face and flowing hair, and pitying her because of her black frock; but they were familiar with her now, and gave her good day in a friendly manner as she passed under the shadow of the colonnade on her way out or in.

Little by little the air of dull despondency gave way before this young woman's earnest desire to be of use to the people who were so kind to her. She played remarkably well, for she had had plenty of the drudgery of pianoforte-playing at the Brixton school, and she was able to take some of the signora's pupils off her hands. She sang, too, in a rich contralto, which promised to be powerful and beautiful by-and-bye; and she practised the ballads in the old operas which the

Signora kept, neatly bound, but yellow with age, in her feeble music-stand.

As her friends had hoped, her sunshiny nature reasserted itself. The outer evidences of her great sorrow gradually passed away, though the memory of her loss still filled her mind; the image of her father, and the thought of that father's unhappy death, were still for ever present with her. It was not in her nature to be long reserved or unsocial; and by and-by, when she had been nearly six months in her new home and the London sparrows were chirping in the bright spring sunshine about the mews and under the colonnade, Miss Vane began to sing at her work as she flitted to and fro in the low rooms, dusting the grand pianoforte and the old china — touching up the frame of Richard's unsaleable picture, the flaring Battle of Bosworth, which illuminated one side of the room. Wherever she went the faithful French poodle ran frisking by her side; whatever sunshine could find its way into the dusky London chamber seemed to concentrate itself about her golden head. Gaiety, life, and brightness, went with her up and down the dark staircase — in and out of the dingy rooms. Her youth and beauty turned the shabby lodging into a fairy palace, as it seemed to Richard and his aunt. When she sat down and ran her agile fingers over the piano, dashing into fantasias and scenas, sparkling and rippling with joyous treble meanderings among the upper notes, the old Clementi grew young again beneath her touch, the worn-out strings were revived by the wondrous magnetism of her youth and vitality. The flute-like treble trills and triplets seemed like the joyous chirpings of a hundred birds. The music-mistress and the scene-

painter used to sit and watch her as she played; their admiring eyes followed her as she flitted to and fro, and they wondered at her grace and beauty.

She had her father's aristocratic elegance, her father's power of fascination. All the dangerous gifts which had been so fatal to George Vane, were inherited by his youngest daughter. Like him, a creature of impulse, spontaneous, sanguine, volatile, she influenced other people by the force of her own superabundant vitality. In her bright hopefulness she made an atmosphere of hope in which other people grew hopeful. The dullest rejoiced in her joyous vivacity, her unconscious loveliness. Yes, perhaps Eleanor Vane's greatest charm lay in her utter ignorance of the fact that she was charming. In the three years' drudgery of a boarding-school she had never learned the power of her own fascination. She knew that people loved her, and she was grateful to them for their affection; but she had never discovered that it was by some wondrous magnetic attraction inherent in herself, that she obtained so much love and devotion.

Nobody had ever taken the trouble to tell her that she was beautiful. She had generally worn shabby frocks, and the rippling golden hair had not very often been smooth; so perhaps the school-girls at Brixton scarcely knew how lovely their companion was. The delicate aquiline profile, the flashing gray eyes, pale face, red lips, and amber hair, were counterbalanced by the silk dresses and lace furbelows of young ladies, whose wealthy fathers paid full price for their education. Poverty learns its place in the little world of a young ladies' boarding-school quite as surely as in the larger world beyond the garden wall which bounds

that establishment. But Eleanor had held her own at the Misses Bennett's seminary, by some mysterious power against which her richer companions had in vain rebelled. Her frank acknowledgment of her poverty, coupled with the fact of her father's former wealth and grandeur, perhaps enabled her to do this. If she wore shabby frocks, she looked more aristocratic in her shabbiness than the other young ladies in their stiff silks and prim finery. They recognised this fact, they acknowledged something in their playfellow which lifted her above themselves, and the half-boarder dealt out patronage and regal condescensions to the most remunerative pupils in the school. She reigned by reason of her unacknowledged beauty, and that divine something, dimly recognised by all about her, but as yet wholly undeveloped. The school-girl was clever, brilliant, fascinating, but it was yet to be discovered what the woman would be. It was yet to be discovered whether these budding qualities would develope into the many flowers of a bright and versatile mind, or burst forth suddenly and mysteriously into that rare tropical blossom, that mental once-in-a-century flourishing aloe, which men call Genius. The good music-mistress watched her young protégée with love and wonder, not unalloyed by fear. What was she to do with this strange and beautiful bird which she had brought home to her nest? Would it be right to fetter this bright spirit for ever? Was it fair to immure all this joyous loveliness in that shabby lodging; to stifle such superabundant vitality in the close atmosphere of a dull and monotonous existence? The faithful creature had been accustomed to consider others, and she thought of this seriously and constantly. Eleanor was

contented and happy. She was earning money now by giving lessons here and there, and she contributed to the family purse. The days slipped by very rapidly, as it seemed, in that peaceful monotony. Miss Vane's frocks appeared to grow shorter and shorter as the young lady sprang up into bright womanhood. She was nearly seventeen now, and had been more than a year and a half living under the shadow of the Bloomsbury Pilasters. Richard and his aunt consulted together as to what her future life ought to be; but they never came nearer to any conclusion.

"It's all very well to talk of her going away from us, you know, aunty," the scene-painter said; "but what are we to do without her? All the sunshine and poetry of our lives will go away with her when she leaves us! Besides! what is she to be? A governess? Bah! who would doom her to that lady-like drudgery? An actress? No, aunty carissima, I should never like to see that bright young beauty behind the glare of the foot-lights. I think I'd rather she should live here for ever and ever, than that her nature should ever be vulgarised by contact with the world. Let us keep her, aunty; she doesn't want to leave us. Those who have any actual claim upon her have abandoned her. She came across my pathway like some wandering homeless angel. I shall never forget her face when I first saw it on the lamplit boulevard, and recognised the little girl I had known three years before in the fair-haired young beauty of fifteen. She doesn't want to go away. Why should you talk of her leaving us, aunty dear?"

Signora Picirillo shrugged her shoulders with a sigh. "Heaven knows I have no wish to part with her,

Dick," she said; "but we ought to do what's right for her sake. This is no place for George Vane's daughter."

But while the music-mistress and her nephew were speculating and theorising upon the future of their protégée, practical Mrs. Bannister was contemplating the infliction of a death-blow which was to shatter the happiness of the humble Bloomsbury circle with one merciless stroke. Early in the bleak March of 1855, Eleanor received a coldly-worded epistle from her half-sister, to the effect that an opportunity had now arisen for her advancement in life; and that if she wished ever to attain a *respectable* position — the adjective was mercilessly underlined — she would do well to avail herself of it. For further information and advice she was to call early the next morning in Hyde Park Gardens. Miss Vane would fain have left this letter unanswered, and at first stoutly refused to obey Mrs. Bannister's summons.

"What do I want with her condescension and patronage?" she said, indignantly. "Does she think that I forget the cruel letter she wrote to my father; or that I forgive her for its heartless insolence? Let her keep her favours for those who solicit them. I want nothing from her. I only want to be left in peace with the friends I love. Do you wish to get rid of me, Signora, that you persuade me to dance attendance upon Mrs. Bannister?"

It was very hard for poor Signora Picirillo to be compelled to urge the child's acceptance of the hand so coldly extended to her, but the good creature felt that it was her duty to do so, and Miss Vane loved her protectress far too dearly to persist in opposing her.

She went, therefore, early the next morning to her half-sister's house at Bayswater, where the spacious rooms seemed doubly spacious when compared with the little sitting-room over the colonnade, the sitting-room which was more than half filled by Clementi's old-fashioned piano. Here the gorgeous Erard's grand, in a case of carved walnut wood and ebony, and with all manner of newfangled improvements, was only an oasis upon the great desert of velvet piles.

Hortensia Bannister was pleased to be very gracious to her half-sister. Perhaps she was all the more so because Eleanor made no pretence of affection for her. This cold, hard-natured woman would have been suspicious of mercenary motives lurking beneath any demonstration of sisterly love.

"I am glad to hear you have been learning to get your own living, Eleanor," she said, "and above all, that you have been cultivating your talent for the piano. I have not forgotten you, you will find. The people with whom you have been living sent me their address when they brought you from Paris, and I knew where to find you when any opportunity should present itself for your advancement. This opportunity has now presented itself. My old acquaintance, Mrs. Darrell, the niece of your father's friend, Maurice de Crespigny, who is still living, though very old and infirm, has written to me saying that she requires a young person who would act as companion and musical governess to a lady who lives with her. This young lady is no relation of Mrs. Darrell's, but is a kind of ward or pupil, I believe. Your youth, in this instance, Eleanor, happens to be an advantage, as the young lady requires a companion of her own age. You will receive

a moderate salary, and will be treated as a member of the family. Let me hear you play, by-the-bye, in order that I may be able to speak positively as to your qualifications."

Eleanor Vane sat down to the piano. The strings of the Erard vibrated under her touch. She was almost frightened at the grand tones that came out of the instrument as she dashed over the keys. She played very brilliantly, however, and her sister condescended to say so.

"I think I may conscientiously give a good account of your playing," she said. "You sing, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"Very well, then; I think you may consider the engagement a settled thing. There is only one question to arrange. Of course you must be aware that the position which your father occupied was once a very elevated one. Mrs. Darrell and her sisters knew your father in his most prosperous days, and lost sight of him before he became poor. They know nothing of his second marriage, or of your birth. His most intimate friend was Mr. de Crespigny, the uncle of the lady whose house I wish you to enter. Under these circumstances you cannot wonder when I tell you that I should strongly object to Mrs. Darrell's knowing who you really are."

"How do you mean, Hortensia?"

"I mean that I shall recommend you as a young person in whose career I feel interested. If you go to Hazlewood at all, you must go under an assumed name."

"Hortensia!"

"Well!" cried Mrs. Bannister, lifting her handsome black eyebrows.

"I don't want this situation, and I should hate to take a false name. I would rather stay with my friends, please. I love them very dearly, and am very happy with them."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Bannister, "what is the use of trying to do some people a service? Here have I been scheming as to how I could manage to avail myself of this chance, and now this ungrateful girl turns round and tells me she doesn't want the situation. Do you know what you are refusing, Eleanor Vane? Have you learnt your father's habit of pauperism, that you prefer to be a burden upon this penniless music-teacher and her son, or nephew, or whatever he is, rather than make an honest effort to get your own living?"

Eleanor started up from the piano: she had been sitting before it until now, softly fingering the keys, and admiring the beauty of the tones. She started up, looking at her sister, and blushing indignantly to the very roots of her auburn hair.

Could this be true? Could she be indeed a burden to the friends she loved so dearly?

"If you think that, Hortensia," she said, "if you think I am any burden to the dear Signora, or Richard, I will take any situation you like, however hard. I'll toil night and day, and work my fingers to the bone, rather than be a trouble or a burden to them any longer."

She remembered how little she earned by her few pupils. Yes, Hortensia was no doubt right. She was a

burden to those good people who had taken her to their home in her hour of desolation and misery.

"I'll take the situation, Hortensia," she cried. "I'll take a false name. I'll do anything in the world rather than impose upon the goodness of my friends."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Bannister, coldly. "Pray do not let us have any heroics about it. The situation is a very good one, I can assure you; and there are many girls who would be glad to snap at such a chance. I will write to my friend, Mrs. Darrell, and recommend you to her notice. I can do no more. I cannot, of course, ensure you success; but Ellen Darrell and I were great friends some years since, and I know that I have considerable influence with her. I'll write and tell you the result of my recommendation."

Eleanor left Hyde Park Gardens after taking two or three sips of some pale sherry which her half-sister gave her. The wine seemed of a sorry vintage, and tasted very much as if the grapes of which it was made had never seen the sun. Miss Vane was glad to set down her wine-glass and escape from the cold splendour of her half-sister's drawing-room.

She walked slowly and sorrowfully back to Bloomsbury. She was to leave her dear friends there; leave the shabby rooms in which she had been so happy, and to go out into the bleak world a dependent upon grand people, so low and humiliated that even her own name must be abandoned by her before she could enter upon the state of dependence. The Bohemian sociality of the Pilasters was to be exchanged for the dreary splendour of a household in which she was to be something a little above the servants.

But it would be cowardly and selfish to refuse this situation, for no doubt cruel Mrs. Bannister had spoken the truth. Eleanor began to think that she had been a burden upon her poor friends.

She was very gloomy and despondent, brooding upon these things, but through every gloomy thought of the present a darker image loomed, far away in the black future. This was the image of her vengeance, the vague and uncertain shadow that had filled her girlish dreams ever since the great sorrow of her father's death had fallen upon her.

"If I go to Hazlewood," she thought, "if I spend my life at Mrs. Darrell's, how can I ever hope to find the murderer of my father?"

CHAPTER XI.

Richard Thornton's promise.

ELEANOR VANE looked very sadly at all the common, every-day sights connected with the domestic economy of the Pilasters, when she went back to Bloomsbury, after her interview with Mrs. Bannister. She had only lived a year and a-half in that humble locality, but it was in her nature to become quickly attached to places as well as persons, and she had grown very fond of the Pilasters. Everybody about the place knew her and loved her. The horses looked out of their open stable-doors as she passed; the dogs came tumbling from their kennels, dragging half-a-dozen yards of rusty iron chain and a heap of straw at their heels, to greet her as she went by; the chimney-sweeps' children courted her notice; and at all the little shops where she had been wont to give orders and pay bills for the Signora, the simple tradespeople tendered her their admiration and homage. Her beauty was a pride to the worthy citizens of the Pilasters. Could all Bloomsbury, from Dudley Street to the Squares, produce sunnier golden hair or brighter gray eyes than were to be seen under the shadow of the dilapidated colonnade when Eleanor Vane went by?

In this atmosphere of love and admiration, the girl had been very happy. She had one of those natures in which there lies a wondrous power of assimilation with the manners and habits of others. She was never out of place; she was never in the way. She was not

ambitious. Her sunny temperament was the centre of perpetual peace and happiness, only to be disturbed by very terrible thunder-claps of sorrow. She had been very happy with the Signora; and to-day she looked sadly round her little sitting-room, her eyes resting now on the old piano, now on a shelf of tattered books, romances dear to Richard and herself, and not too well treated by either; now on the young man's flaming *magnum opus*, the picture she had loved to criticise and abuse in mischievous enjoyment of the painter's anguish. As she looked at these things, and remembered how soon she must go away from them, the slow tears trickled down her cheeks, and she stood despondent on the gloomy threshold of her new life.

She had found the familiar rooms empty upon her return from Bayswater, for the Signora was away teaching beyond the regions of the New Road, and Richard was hard at work at the Phoenix, where there were always new pieces to be produced and new scenes to be painted. Eleanor had the little sitting-room all to herself; she took off her bonnet and sat down upon the old-fashioned chintz-covered sofa. She buried her head in the cushions and tried to think.

The prospect of a new existence which would have been delightful to most girls of her age, was utterly distasteful to her. Her nature was adhesive; she would have gone to the furthest end of the world with her father if he had lived, or with Richard and the Signora, whom she loved only less than she had loved him. But to sever every tie, and go out alone into the world with nothing between her and desolation, was unspeakably terrible to this affectionate, impulsive girl.

If it had been simply a question of her own advantage, if by the sacrifice of her own advancement, her every prospect in life, she might have stayed with the friends she loved, she would not have hesitated for a moment. But it was not so. Mrs. Bannister had clearly told her that she was a burden upon these generous people who had sheltered and succoured her in her hour of misery. The cruel word pauperism had been flung in her teeth, and with a racking brain this poor girl set herself to calculate how much her maintenance cost her friends, and how much she was able to contribute out of her own pitiful earnings.

Alas! the balance told against her when the sum was done. Her earnings were very, very small as yet; not because her talent was unappreciated, but because her pupils were poor, and a music-mistress, whose address was Bloomsbury Pilasters, could scarcely demand high payment for her services, or hope to obtain a very aristocratic connection.

No, Mrs. Bannister — stern, uncompromising, and disagreeable as the truth itself — had no doubt been right. Her duty lay before her, plainly indicated by that unpleasant monitor. She was bound to leave these dear friends, and to go out into the world to fight a lonely battle for herself.

“I may be able to do something for them,” she thought; and this thought was the only gleam of light which illumined the darkness of her sorrow. “I may be able to save money enough to buy the Signora a black silk dress, and Richard a meerschaum. I should so like to buy Dick a meerschaum; I know the one he’d like — a bull-dog’s head, with a silver collar

round the neck. We looked at it one night at a shop in Holborn."

She rose from the sofa at last with an aching heart and troubled brain, when the early shadows of the spring twilight were gathering in the room. She made up the fire and swept the hearth, and arranged the tea-things on the comfortable round table, and then sat down on a low stool by the fender to toast great rounds of bread, which would be as nothing in comparison to Richard's all-devouring capacity after a hard day's work in the scene-room at the Phoenix. How pleasant it was to perform all these little familiar offices of love and duty. How sorrowfully she looked back to her simple, free-and-easy life, now that she was to go amongst strangers who would exact all manner of ceremonious observances from her. The Bohemianism of her existence had been its greatest charm; and this poor benighted girl trembled at the prospect of a life in which she would have to go through all those terrible performances which she had read of, fearfully and wonderingly, in certain erudite essays upon Etiquette, but which had never yet come within the range of her experiences.

"It is my duty to go away from them," she kept saying to herself; "it is my duty to go away."

She had schooled herself in this difficult duty by the time her friends came home, and she told them very quietly that she had seen Mrs. Bannister, and had agreed to accept her patronage and services.

"I am going to be a sort of companion or musical governess—I scarcely know which—to a young lady at a country house called Hazlewood," she said. "Don't think I am not sorry to leave you, dear Sig-

nora, but Hortensia says it is better that I should do so."

"And don't think that I am not sorry to lose you, Nelly, when I tell you that I think your sister is right," the Signora answered gently, as she kissed her protégée.

Perhaps Eleanor was a little disappointed at this reply. She little dreamed how often Eliza Picirillo had struggled against the selfishness of her affection, before she had grown thus resigned to this parting.

Mr. Richard Thornton groaned aloud.

"I shall go out and pull down a couple of the Pilasters, and bury myself under them, à la Sampson," he said piteously. "What is to become of us without you, Eleanor? Who will come over to the Phoenix, and applaud my great scenes with the ferule of an umbrella? Who'll cut up half-quartern loaves into toast when I am hungry, or have Welsh rarebits in readiness on the hob, when I come home late at night? Who'll play Mendelssohn's 'Songs without Words' to me, and darn my stockings, and sew buttons — absurd institutions, invented by ignorant people, who have never known the blessing of pins — upon my shirts? Who'll abuse me when I go unshaven, or recommend blacking as an embellishment for my boots? Who'll career in and out of the room with a dirty white French poodle at her heels, looking like a fair-haired Esmeralda with a curly-coated goat? What are we to do without you, Eleanor?"

There was a sharp pain at poor Dick's heart as he apostrophised his adopted sister. Were his feelings quite brotherly? was there no twinge of the fatal torture so common to mankind mingled with this young

man's feelings as he looked at the beautiful face opposite to him, and remembered how soon it would have vanished from that shabby chamber, leaving only dismal emptiness behind?

The Signora looked at her nephew and sighed. Yet, it was far better that Eleanor should go away. She could never have grown to love this honest-hearted, candid, slovenly scene-painter, whose coat was a perfect landscape in distemper by reason of the many coloured splashes which adorned it.

"My poor Dick would have fallen in love with her, and would have broken his good, honest heart," Eliza Picirillo said. "I'm very glad she's going away."

So from the road which Destiny had appointed for her to tread, there was not one voice to call Eleanor Vane aside. The affectionate and the indifferent alike conspired to urge her onward. It was only her own inclination that would have held her back.

"If I could have stayed in London," she thought, "there might have been some chance of my meeting that man. All scamps and villains come to hide themselves in London. But in a quiet country village I shall be buried alive. When I pass the threshold of Mrs. Darrell's house, I bid good-bye to the hope of crossing that man's pathway."

The letter came very quickly from Mrs. Bannister. Mrs. Darrell had accepted her dear friend's recommendation, and was ready to receive Miss Vincent. It was under this name the stockbroker's widow had introduced her half-sister to the notice of her friend.

"You will receive a salary of thirty pounds a year," Hortensia Bannister wrote, "and your duties will be

very light. Do not forget that your name at Hazlewood is to be Vincent, and that you are carefully to avoid all reference to your father. You will be amongst people who knew him well; and must, therefore, be on your guard. I have described you as the orphan daughter of a gentleman who died in reduced circumstances, and have thus strictly adhered to the truth. No questions will be asked of you, as Mrs. Darrell is satisfied with my recommendation, and is too well bred to feel any vulgar curiosity as to your past history. I send you, per parcel delivery, a box of dresses and other wearing apparel, which will be of use to you. I also send you five pounds for such little extra expenditure as may be necessary. Hazlewood is thirty miles from London, and about seven from Windsor. You will go down by the Great Western, and stop at Slough, where a conveyance will meet you; but I will write further upon this matter before you go. Mrs. Darrell has kindly accorded you a fortnight's delay for such preparations as you may require to make. You will be expected at Hazlewood on the 6th of April.

"I have only one other remark to make. I know that your father cherished a foolish notion upon the subject of the Woodlands property. Pray bear in mind that no such idea has ever been entertained by me. I know the Darrell family quite well enough to feel assured that they will take care of their own rights, which I am content to acknowledge. Remember, therefore, that I have no wish or expectation with regard to Maurice de Crespigny's will; but it is, on the other hand, perfectly true, that in his youth he did make a solemn promise that, in the event of his dying a bachelor, he would leave that money to my father or his heirs."

Eleanor Vane took very little notice of this final paragraph in her sister's letter. Who cared for Maurice de Crespigny's fortune? What was the good of it *now*? It could not bring her father back to life; it could not blot out that quiet, unwitnessed death-scene in the Parisian café; it could not rehabilitate the broken name, or restore the shattered life. What could it matter who inherited the useless dross?

The fortnight passed in a feverish unsatisfactory manner. Richard and the Signora took care to conceal the poignancy of their regret at parting with the girl who had brought such new brightness into their narrow lives. Eleanor wept by stealth; dropping many bitter tears over her work, as she remodelled Mrs. Bannister's silk dresses, reducing those garments to the dimensions of her own girlish figure. The last night came by-and-by, the night of the 5th of April, the eve of a sorrowful parting, and the beginning of a new existence.

It happened to be a Sunday evening, and Eleanor and Richard walked out together in the quiet Bloomsbury streets while the bells were ringing for evening service, and the lamps glimmering dimly from the church windows. They chose the loneliest streets in the old-fashioned middle-class quarter. Eleanor was very pale, very silent. This evening walk had been her express desire, and Richard watched her wonderingly. Her face had an expression which he remembered in the Rue de l'Archevêque, when he had told her the story of her father's death — an unnaturally rigid look, strangely opposed to the changeful brightness common to that youthful countenance.

They had strolled slowly hither and thither in the deserted streets for some time. The bells had ceased

ringing, and the church-goers had all disappeared. The gray twilight was stealing into the streets and squares, and the lights began to shine out from the lower windows.

"How quiet you are, Nelly," Richard said at last; "why were you so anxious that we should come out together alone, my dear? I fancied you had something particular to say to me."

"I have something particular to say."

"What about?" asked Mr. Thornton.

He looked thoughtfully at his companion. He could only see her profile — that clearly-defined, almost classical outline — for she had not turned towards him when she spoke. Her gray eyes looked straight before her into empty space, and her lips were tightly compressed.

"You love me, don't you, Richard?" she asked presently, with a suddenness that startled the scene-painter.

Poor Dick blushed crimson at that alarming inquiry. How could she be so cruel as to ask him such a question? For the last fortnight he had been fighting with himself — sturdily and honestly — in the heroic desire to put away this one fatal thought from his mind; and now the girl for whose sake he had been doing battle with his own selfishness, struck the tenderest of all chords with her ignorant hand, and wounded her victim to the very quick.

But Miss Vane had no consciousness of the mischief she had done. Coquetry was an unknown science to this girl of seventeen. In all matters connected with that womanly accomplishment she was as much a child now that her seventeenth birthday was past, as she

had been in the old days at Chelsea when she had upset Richard's colour boxes and made grotesque copies of his paintings.

"I know you love me, Dick," she continued, "quite as much as if I were your real sister, instead of a poor desolate girl who flung herself upon you and yours in the day of her affliction. I know you love me, Dick, and would do almost anything for my sake, and I wanted to speak to you to-night alone, because I am going to say something that would distress the dear Signora, if she were to hear it."

"What is it, my dear?"

"You remember the story of my father's death?"

"Only too well, Eleanor."

"And you remember the vow I made when you told me that story, Richard?"

The young man hesitated.

"Yes, I do remember, Nelly," he said, after a pause; "but I had hoped that you had forgotten that foolish vow. For it was foolish, you know, my dear, as well as unwomanly," the young man added gravely.

Eleanor's eyes flashed defiance upon her friend, as she turned to him for the first time that evening.

"Yes," she cried, "you thought that I had forgotten, because I was not always talking of that man who caused my father's death. You thought my sorrow for my father was only childish grief, that was to be forgotten when I turned my back upon the country where he lies in his abandoned grave — his unconsecrated grave! You thought that nobody would ever try to avenge the poor, lonely old man's murder — for it was a murder, Richard Thornton! What did the wretch who robbed him care for the anguish of the

heart he broke? What did he care what became of his victim? It was as base and cruel a murder as was ever done upon this earth, Richard, though the world would not call it by that name."

"Eleanor, my dear Eleanor! why do you talk of these things?"

The girl's voice had risen with the vehemence of her passion, and Richard Thornton dreaded the effect which this kind of conversation might have upon her excitable nature.

"Nelly, my dear," he said, "it would be better to forget all this. What good can you do by cherishing these painful recollections? You are never likely to meet this man; you do not even know his name. He was a scamp and an adventurer, no doubt; he may be dead by this time. He may have done something to bring himself within the power of the law, and he may be in prison, or transported."

"He may have done something to bring himself within the power of the law," repeated Eleanor. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that he may have committed some crime for which he could be punished."

"Could he be punished by the law for having cheated my father at cards?"

"That sort of charge is always difficult to be proved, Nell; impossible to be proved after the fact. No, I'm afraid the law could never touch him for that."

"But if he were to commit some other crime, he might be punished?"

"Of course."

"If I met him, Richard," cried Eleanor Vane, with

a dangerous light kindling in her eyes, "I would try and lure him on to commit some crime, and then turn round upon him and say, 'The law of the land could not avenge my father's death, but it can punish you for a lesser crime. I have twisted the law to my own purpose, and made it redress my father's wrongs.'"

Richard Thornton stared aghast at his companion.

"Why, Eleanor," he exclaimed, "you talk like a Red Indian! This is quite shocking. You frighten me, really; you do indeed."

"I am sorry for that, Richard," Miss Vane answered meekly. She was a child in all things which concerned her affections alone. "I wouldn't grieve you or the dear Signora for the world. But there are some things that are stronger than ourselves, Richard, and the oath that I took a year and a-half ago, in the Rue de l'Archevêque is one of those things. I have never forgotten, Dick. Night after night — though I've been happy and light-hearted enough in the day, for I could not be otherwise than happy with you and the Signora — night after night I have lain awake thinking of my father's death. If that death had been a common one; if he had died in my arms at the will of God instead of by the cruelty of a wretch, my grief might have worn itself out by this time. But as it is, I cannot forget; I cannot forgive. If all the Christian people in the world were to talk to me, I could never have one merciful feeling towards this man. If he were going to be hung to-morrow, I should be glad; and could walk barefoot to the place of his execution to see him suffer. There is no treachery that I should think base if employed against him. There is no slow torture I could inflict upon him that would seem cruel

enough to satisfy my hatred of him. Think what a helpless old man my father was; a broken-down gentleman; the sort of man whom everybody pities, whom every body respects. Remember this; and then remember the cold-blooded deliberation of the wretch who cheated him out of the money which was more than money to him — which represented honour — honesty — his child's future — all he valued. Remember the remorseless cruelty of the wretch who looked on while this helpless old man suffered a slow agony of six or seven hours' duration, and then left him alone in his despair. Think of this, Richard Thornton, and don't wonder any longer if my feelings towards this man are not *Christian-like*."

"My dear Eleanor, if I regret the vehemence of your feeling upon this subject, I do not defend the man whose treachery hurried your father to his unhappy death; I only wish to convince you of the folly you commit in cherishing these ideas of vengeance and retribution. Life is not a three-volume novel or a five-act play, you know, Nelly. The sudden meetings and strange coincidences common in novels are not very general in our every-day existence. It is not at all likely that in the whole course of your life you will ever again encounter this man. From the moment of your father's death all clue to him was lost; for it was only your father who could have told us who and what he was, or, at least, who and what he represented himself to be. He is lost in the vast chaos of humanity now, my dear, and you have not the frailest clue by which you might hope to find him. For Heaven's sake, then, abandon all thought of an impossible revenge. Have you forgotten the words we heard in the Epistle

a few weeks ago — 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord?' If the melodramatic revenge of the stage is not practicable in real life, we know at least, my dear — for you see we have it from very high authority — that wicked deeds do not go unpunished. Far away at the remotest limits of the earth, this man, whom your puny efforts would be powerless to injure, may suffer for his crime. Try and think of this, Eleanor."

"*I cannot,*" answered the girl. "The letter which my father wrote me before he died was a direct charge which I will never disobey. The only inheritance I received from him was that letter; that letter in which he told me to avenge his death. I dare say you think me mad as well as wicked, Richard; but in spite of all you have said, *I believe that I shall meet that man!*"

The scene-painter sighed and relapsed into despondent silence. How could he argue with this girl? What could he do but love and admire her, and entrust himself to her direction if she had need of a slave. While he was thinking this, Eleanor clasped both her hands upon his arm and looked up earnestly in his face.

"Richard," she said in a low voice, "I think you would serve me if you had the power."

"I would go through fire and water to do so, Nelly."

"I want you to help me in this matter. You know as little of this man as I do, but you are much cleverer than me. You mix with other people and see something of the world; not much, I know, but still a great deal more than I do. I am going away into a quiet country

place, where there is no possible chance of meeting this man; you will stay in London —”

“Where I may brush against him in the streets any day, Nell, without being a shade the wiser as to his identity. My dear child, for any practical purpose you will be as near the man in Berkshire as I shall be in Bloomsbury. Don't let's talk of him any longer, Nelly. I can't tell you how this subject distresses me.”

“I won't leave off talking of him,” said the young lady, resolutely, “until you have made me a promise.”

“What promise?”

“That if ever you do come across any clue which may lead to the identification of the man I want to find, you will follow it up, patiently and faithfully, sparing neither trouble nor cost; for my sake, Richard, for my sake. Will you promise?”

“I will, my dear,” Mr. Thornton answered. “I do promise, and I will keep my promise honestly if ever the chance of doing so should come to me. But I must tell you frankly, Nell, I don't believe it ever will.”

“Bless you for the promise, notwithstanding, Richard,” Eleanor said, warmly. “It has made me much happier. There will be two people henceforth, instead of one, set against this man.”

A dark frown over-shadowed her face. It seemed as if she had uttered those last few words in the form of a threat and a defiance, which the man, whoever he was, and wherever he was, might hear.

“You know all the strange things they say now about second sight, clairvoyance, odic force, magnetic attraction — all sorts of long words whose meaning I don't understand, Richard — I wonder sometimes if this man *knows* that I hate him, and that I am watching

for him, thinking of him, praying to meet him day and night. Perhaps he does know this and will hold himself on his guard against me, and try and avoid me."

Richard shrank from entering upon this subject; the conversation had been altogether disagreeable to him. There was a horrible discrepancy between this girl's innocent youthful beauty and all this determined talk of fierce and eager vengeance, which would have been more natural to a Highland or Corsican chieftain, than to a young lady of seventeen.

It was dark now, and they went back to the Pilasters, where Eliza Picirillo was spending that last night very mournfully. The shabby room was only illumined by the glimmer of a low fire, for the Signora had not cared to light the candles until her two children came home. She had been sitting by the dingy window watching for their return, and had fallen asleep in the darkness.

There is no need to dwell upon that last night. It was like the eves of all partings, very sad, very uncomfortable. Everything was disorganised by that approaching sorrow. Conversation was desultory and forced, and Richard was glad to be employed in cording Eleanor's boxes. She had two trunks now, and had a wardrobe that seemed to her magnificent, so liberally had Mrs. Bannister bestowed her cast-off dresses upon her half-sister.

So the last night passed away, the April morning came, and Eleanor's new life began.

CHAPTER XII.

Gilbert Monckton.

ELEANOR VANE was not to go down to Berkshire alone. The beginning of her new life, that terrible beginning which she so much dreaded, was to make her acquainted with new people.

She had received the following communication from Mrs. Darrell.

“Hazlewood, April 3rd, 1855.

“Madam,

“As it would of course be very improper for a young lady of your age to travel alone, I have provided against that contingency.

“My friend, Mr. Monckton, has kindly promised to meet you in the first-class waiting-room at the Great Western Station, at three o'clock on Monday afternoon. He will drive you here on his way home.

“I am, Madam,

“Yours faithfully,

“ELLEN DARRELL.”

Eliza Picirillo worked harder upon a Monday than on any other day in the week. She left the Pilasters immediately after an early breakfast, to go upon a wearisome round amongst her pupils. Richard was in the thick of the preparations for a new piece, so poor Eleanor was obliged to go alone to the station, to meet the stranger who had been appointed as her escort to Hazlewood.

She quite broke down when the time came for bidding farewell to her old friend. She clung about the Signora, weeping unrestrainedly for the first time.

"I can't bear to go away from you," she sobbed piteously, "I can't bear to say good-bye."

"But my love," the music-mistress answered tenderly, "if you really don't wish to go —"

"No, no, it isn't that. I feel that I must go — that —"

"And I, too, my dear girl. I believe you would do very wrong in refusing this situation. But Nelly, my darling, remember that this is only an experiment. You may not be happy at Hazlewood. In that case you will not fail to remember that your home is always here; that come to it when you may, you will never fail to find a loving welcome; and that the friends you leave behind you here are friends whom nothing upon earth can ever estrange from you. Remember this, Eleanor."

"Yes, yes, dear, dear Signora."

"If I could have gone with her to the station, I shouldn't have cared so much," Richard murmured despondently, "but the laws of Spavin and Cromshaw are as the laws of Draco. If I don't get on with the Swiss chalet and moonlight Alpine peaks, the new piece can't come out on Monday."

So poor Eleanor went to the station alone, and was overcharged by the cabman who carried the two trunks which Richard had neatly addressed to Miss Vincent, Hazlewood, Berks.

She was received by a civil porter, who took charge of her luggage while she went to the waiting-room to look for the stranger who was to be her escort.

She was no more a coquette than she had been nearly two years before when she travelled alone between London and Paris, and she was prepared to accept the services of this stranger quite as frankly as she

had accepted the care and protection of the elderly gentleman who had ~~taken~~ charge of her upon that occasion.

But how was ~~she~~ to recognise the stranger? She could not walk up to every gentleman in the waiting-room, to ask him if he were Mr. Monckton.

She had in almost all her wanderings travelled in second-class carriages, and waited in second-class waiting-rooms. She shrank back, therefore, rather timidly upon the threshold of the spacious carpeted saloon, and looked a little nervously at the occupants of that gorgeous chamber. There was a group of ladies near the fire-place, and there were three gentlemen in different parts of the room. One of these gentlemen was a little man with gray hair and a red face; the other was very young and very sandy; the third was a tall man of about forty, with close-cut black hair, and a square massive face and head, not exactly a handsome face, perhaps, but a countenance not easily to be overlooked.

This tall man was standing near one of the windows, reading a newspaper. He looked up as Eleanor pushed open the swinging door.

"I wonder which of them is Mr. Monckton," she thought. "Not that fidgetty young man with the red hair, I hope."

While she still stood doubtfully upon the threshold, hesitating what to do — she little knew what a pretty picture she made in that timid, fluttering attitude — the tall man threw down his newspaper upon the sofa beside him, and walked across the room to where she stood.

"Miss Vincent, I believe?" he said.

Eleanor blushed at the sound of that false name, and then bent her head in reply to the question. She

could not say yes. She could not fall into this disagreeable falsehood all at once.

"I am Mrs. Darrell's friend and legal adviser, Mr. Monckton," the gentleman said, "and I shall be very happy to perform the duty she has entrusted to me. We are in very good time, Miss Vincent. I know that young ladies are generally *ultra* punctual upon these occasions; and I came very early in order to anticipate you, if possible."

Eleanor did not speak. She was looking furtively at the face of Mrs. Darrell's friend and legal adviser. A good and wise adviser, Miss Vane thought: for the face, not strictly handsome, seemed to bear in its every feature the stamp of three qualities — goodness, wisdom, and strength.

"I am sure he is very good," she thought; "but I would not like to offend him for the world, for though he looks so kind now, I know he must be terrible when he's angry."

She looked almost fearfully at the strongly-marked black eyebrows, thinking what a stormy darkness must overshadow the massive face when they contracted over the grave, brown eyes — serious and earnest eyes, but with a latent fire lurking somewhere in their calm depths, Eleanor thought.

The girl's mind rambled on thus while she stood by the stranger's side in the sunlit window. Already the blackness of her new life was broken by this prominent figure standing boldly out upon its very threshold. Already she was learning to be interested in new people.

"He isn't a bit like a lawyer," she thought; "I fancied lawyers were always shabby old men, with blue bags. The men who used to come to Chelsea

after papa were always nasty disagreeable men, with papers about the Queen and Richard Roe."

Mr. Monckton looked thoughtfully down at the girl by his side. There was a vein of silent poetry, and there were dim glimpses of artistic feeling hidden somewhere in the nature of this man, very far below the hard, business-like exterior which he presented to the world. He felt a quiet pleasure in looking at Eleanor's young beauty. It was her youthfulness, perhaps, her almost childlike innocence, which made her greatest charm. Her face was not that of a common beauty; her aquiline nose, gray eyes, and firmly-moulded mouth had a certain air of queenliness very rarely to be seen; but the youth of the soul shining out of the clear eyes was visible in every glance, in every change of expression.

"Do you know much of Berkshire, Miss Vincent?" the lawyer asked, presently,

"Oh, no, I have never been there."

"You are very young, and I daresay have never left home before?" Mr. Monckton said. He was wondering that no relative or friend had accompanied the girl to the station.

"I have been at school," Eleanor answered; "but I have never been away from home before — to — to get my own living."

"I thought not. Your papa and mamma must be very sorry to lose you."

"I have neither father nor mother."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Monckton; "that's strange."

Then after a pause he said, in a low voice:

"I think the young lady you are going to will like you all the better for that."

"Why?" Eleanor asked involuntarily.

"Because she has never known either father or mother."

"Poor girl!" murmured Eleanor, "they are both dead, then?"

The lawyer did not answer this question. He was so far professional, even in his conversation with Miss Vane, that he asked a great many more questions than he answered.

"Do you like going to Hazlewood, Miss Vincent?" he said, by-and-by, rather abruptly.

"Not very much."

"Why not?"

"Because I am leaving very dear friends to go to—"

"Strangers, who may illtreat you, eh?" muttered Mr. Monckton. "You need have no apprehension of that sort of thing, I assure you, Miss Vincent. Mrs. Darrell is rather rigid in her ideas of life; she has had her disappointments, poor soul, and you must be patient with her: but Laura Mason, the young lady who is to be your companion, is the gentlest and most affectionate girl in Christendom, I should think. She is a sort of ward of mine, and her future life is in my hands; a very heavy responsibility, Miss Vincent; she will have plenty of money by-and-by — houses, and horses, and carriages, and servants, and all the outer paraphernalia of happiness: but Heaven knows if she will be happy, poor girl. She has never known either mother or father. She has lived with all manner of respectable matrons, who have promised to do a mother's duty to her, and have tried to do it, I daresay; but she has never had a mother, Miss Vincent. I am always sorry for her when I think of that."

The lawyer sighed heavily, and his thoughts seemed to wander away from the young lady in his charge. He still stood at the window, looking out at the bustle on the platform, but not seeing it, I think, and took no further notice of Eleanor until the bell rang for the starting of the train.

"Come, Miss Vincent," he said, rousing himself suddenly from his reverie; "I have forgotten all about your ticket. I'll put you into a carriage, and then send a porter for it."

Mr. Monckton scarcely spoke to his companion half a dozen times during the brief journey to Slough. He sat with a newspaper before him, but Eleanor noticed that he never turned its leaves, and once, when she caught a glimpse of the lawyer's face, she saw that it wore the same gloomy and abstracted expression that she had observed upon it as Mr. Monckton stood in the window of the waiting-room.

"He must be very fond of his ward," she thought, "or he could never be so sorry because she has no mother. I thought lawyers were hard, cruel men, who cared for nothing in the world. I always used to fancy my sister Hortensia ought to have been a lawyer."

By-and-by, as they drew very near to the station, Mr. Monckton dropped his newspaper with another sigh, and turning to Eleanor, said, in a low, confidential voice:

"I hope you will be very good to Laura Mason, Miss Vincent. Remember that she stands quite alone in the world; and that however friendless, however desolate you may be — I say this because you tell me you are an orphan — you can never be so friendless or so desolate as she is."

CHAPTER XIII.

Hazlewood.

A PHAETON and pair was in waiting for Mr. Monckton outside the Slough station. The vehicle was very plain, but had a certain quiet elegance of its own, and the horses had been sold at Tattersall's for something over five hundred pounds.

Eleanor Vane's spirits rose in spite of herself as she sat by the lawyer's side, driving at a rapid rate through the pretty pastoral country. They crossed the river almost immediately after leaving Slough, and dashed into Berkshire. They skirted Windsor Park and Forest, leaving the black outline of the castle keep behind them; and then turned into a quiet country road, where the green banks were dotted by clumps of early primroses, and the white-thorns were bursting into flower.

Eleanor looked rapturously at all this rural beauty. She was a Cockney, poor child, and her experience of the country was confined to rambles in Greenwich Park, or on Richmond Terrace; happy rambles with her father, prior to expensive dinners at the Crown and Sceptre, or the Star and Garter, as the case might be.

But the country, the genuine country, the long roads and patches of common, the glimpses of wood and water, the great deserts of arable land, the scattered farm-houses, and noisy farm-yards; all these were strange and new to her, and her soul expanded in the unfamiliar atmosphere.

If that drive could have lasted for ever, it would have been very delightful; but she knew that those splendid chestnut horses were carrying her at a terrible rate to her new home. Her new home! What right had she to call Hazlewood by that name? She was not going home. She was going to her first situation.

All the pride of birth, the foolish and mistaken pride in shipwrecked fortune and squandered wealth which this girl's weak-minded father had instilled into her, arose and rebelled against this bitter thought. What humiliation Mrs. Bannister's cruelty had inflicted upon her!

She was thinking this when Mr. Monckton suddenly turned his horses' heads away from the main road, and the phaeton entered a lane above which the branches of the still leafless trees made an overarching roof of delicate tracery.

At the end of this lane, in which the primroses seemed to grow thicker than in any other part of the country, there were some low wooden gates, and an old-fashioned iron lamp-post. On the other side of the gates there was a wide lawn shut in by a shrubbery and a grove of trees, and beyond the lawn glimmered the sunlit windows of a low white house; a rambling cottage whose walls were half-hidden by trelliswork and ivy, and not one of whose windows or chimneys owned a fellowship with the others.

Pigeons were cooing and hens clucking somewhere behind the house, a horse began to neigh as the carriage stopped, and three dogs, one very big, and two very little ones, ran out upon the lawn, and barked furiously at the phaeton.

Eleanor Vane could not help thinking the low-roofed, white-walled, ivy-covered irregular cottage very pretty, even though it *was* Hazlewood.

While the dogs were barking their loudest, a delicate little figure, in fluttering draperies of white and blue, came floating out of a window under the shadow of a verandah, and ran towards the gates.

It was the figure of a young lady, very fragile-looking and graceful. A young lady whose complexion was fairer than a snow-drop, and whose loose floating hair was of the palest shade of flaxen.

"Be quiet, Julius Cæsar; be quiet, Mark Antony," she cried, to the dogs, who ran up to her and leaped and whirled about her, jumping almost higher than her head in an excess of canine spirits. "Be quiet, you big, wicked Julius Cæsar, or you shall go back to the stables, sir. Is this the way you behave yourself when I've had ever so much trouble to get you a half-holiday? Please, don't mind them, Miss Vincent," the young lady added, opening the gate, and looking up pleadingly at Eleanor; "they're only noisy. They wouldn't hurt you for the world; and they'll love you very much by-and-by, when they come to know you. I've been watching for you such a time, Mr. Monckton. The train must have been very slow this afternoon!"

"The train travelled at its usual speed, neither slower nor faster," the lawyer said, with a quiet smile, as he handed Eleanor out of the phaeton. He left the horses in the care of the groom, and walked on to the lawn with the two girls. The dogs left off barking at a word from him, though they had made very light of Miss Mason's entreaties. They seemed to know him, and to be accustomed to obey him.

"I know the afternoon *seemed* dreadfully long," the young lady said. "I thought the train *must* be behind its time."

"And, of course, you never thought of looking at your watch, Miss Mason," the lawyer said, pointing to a quantity of jewelled toys which hung at the young lady's blue sash.

"What's the good of looking at one's watch, if one's watch won't go?" said Miss Mason; "the sun has been going down ever so long, but the sun's so changeable, there's no relying on it. Mrs. Darrell has gone out in the pony-carriage to call upon some people near Woodlands."

Eleanor Vane started at the sudden mention of a name which had been so familiar to her from her dead father's lips.

"So I am all alone," continued Miss Mason, "and I'm very glad of that; because we shall get to know each other so much better by ourselves; shan't we, Miss Vincent?"

George Monckton had been walking between the two girls, but Laura Mason came round to Eleanor, and put her hand in that of Miss Vane. It was a fat little childish hand, but there were rings glittering upon it, small as it was.

"I think I shall like you very much," Miss Mason whispered. "Do you think you shall like me?"

She looked up into Eleanor's face, with an entreating expression in her blue eyes; they were really blue eyes, a bright forget-me-not, or turquoise blue, as different as possible from Eleanor's clear gray ones, which were for ever changing, sometimes purple, sometimes brown, sometimes black.

How could Miss Vane reply to this childish question, except in the affirmative? She had every inclination to love the babyish young lady, who was so ready to cling to her and confide in her. She had expected to find a haughty heiress who would have flaunted her wealth before her penniless companion. But she had another reason for inclining tenderly towards this girl. She remembered what Mr. Monckton had said to her in the railway carriage.

"However friendless or desolate you may be, you can never be so friendless and desolate as she is."

Eleanor pressed the hand that clung to hers, and said, gravely:

"I'm sure I shall love you, Miss Mason, if you'll let me."

"And you'll not be dreadful, about triplets and arpeggios, and cinquepated passages," the young lady said, piteously. "I don't mind music a bit, in a general way, you know; but I never could play triplets in time."

She led the way into a sitting-room under the verandah, as she talked. Eleanor went with her, hand-in-hand, and Mr. Monckton followed, keeping an attentive watch upon the two girls.

The sitting-room was like the exterior of the cottage, very irregular and very pretty. It stood at one end of the house, and there were windows upon three sides of the room, — an oriel at the end opposite the door, a bay opening on to the verandah, and three latticed windows with deep oaken seats upon the other side.

The furniture was pretty, but very simple and inexpensive. The chintz curtains and chair-covers were

sprinkled with rose-buds and butterflies; the chairs and tables were of shining maple-wood; and there was a good supply of old china arranged here and there upon brackets and cabinets of obsolete form. The pale cream-coloured walls were hung with a few prints and water-coloured sketches; but beyond this the chamber had no adornments.

Laura Mason led Eleanor to one of the window-seats, where a litter of fancy-work, and two or three open books tumbled carelessly here and there amongst floss-silks and Berlin wools and scraps of embroidery, gave token of the young lady's habits.

"Will you take off your things here," she said, "or shall I show you your own room at once? It's the blue room, next to mine. There's a door between the two rooms, so we shall be able to talk to each other whenever we like. How dreadfully you must want something to eat after your journey! Shall I ring for cake and wine, or shall we wait for tea? We always drink tea at seven, and we dine very early; not like Mr. Monckton, who has a grand late dinner every evening."

The lawyer sighed.

"Rather a desolate dinner, sometimes, Miss Mason," he said, gravely; "but you remind me that I shall be hardly in time for it, and my poor housekeeper makes herself wretched when the fish is spoiled."

He looked at his watch.

"Six o'clock, I declare; good-bye, Laura; good-bye, Miss Vincent. I hope you will be happy at Hazlewood."

"I am *sure* I shall be happy with Miss Mason," Eleanor answered.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Monckton, elevating his straight black eyebrows, "is she so very fascinating, then? I'm sorry for it," he muttered under his breath as he walked off after shaking hands with the two girls.

They heard the phaeton driving away three minutes afterwards.

Laura Mason shrugged her shoulders with an air of relief.

"I'm glad he's gone," she said.

"But you like him very much. He's very good, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes, very, very good, and I do like him. But I'm afraid of him, I think, because he's so good. He always seems to be watching one and finding out one's faults. And he seems so sorry because I'm frivolous, and I can't help being frivolous when I'm happy."

"And are you always happy?" Eleanor asked. She thought it very possible that this young heiress, who had never known any of those bitter troubles which Miss Vane had found associated with "money matters," might indeed be *always* happy. But Laura Mason shook her head.

"Always, except when I think," she said; "but when I think about papa and mamma, and wonder who they were, and why I never knew them, I can't help feeling very unhappy."

"They died when you were very young, then?" Eleanor said.

Laura Mason shook her head with a sorrowful gesture.

"I scarcely know when they died," she answered; "I know that I can remember nothing about them; the first thing I recollect is being with a lady, far down in Devonshire — a lady who took the charge of

several little girls. I stayed with her till I was ten years old, and then I was sent to a fashionable school at Bayswater, and I stayed there till I was fifteen, and then I came here, and I've been here two years and a-half. Mr. Monckton is my guardian, you know, and he says that I'm a very lucky girl, and will have plenty of money by-and-by; but what's the use of money if one has no relations in all the wide world? and he tells me to attend to my education, and not to be frivolous, or care for dress and jewellery, but to try and become a good woman. He talks to me very seriously, and almost frightens me sometimes with his grave manner; but, for all that, he's very kind, and lets me have almost everything I ask him for. He's tremendously rich himself, you know, though he is only a professional man, and he lives at a beautiful place four miles from here, called Tolldale Priory. I used to ask him questions about papa and mamma, but he would never tell me anything. So now I never speak to him about them."

She sighed as she finished speaking, and was silent for some few minutes; but she very quickly recovered her spirits, and conducted Eleanor to a pretty rustic chamber with a lattice window looking on to the lawn.

"Mrs. Darrell's man is gone to fetch your luggage," Miss Mason said, "so you must have my brushes and combs, please, for your hair, and then we'll go down to tea."

She led Eleanor into the adjoining apartment, where the dressing-table was littered with all manner of womanly frivolities, and here Miss Vane re-arranged her luxuriant golden brown hair, which no longer was allowed to fall about her shoulders in rippling curls,

but was drawn simply away from her forehead, and rolled in a knot at the back of her head. She was a woman now, and had begun the battle of life.

A pony-carriage drove up to the gate while Eleanor was standing at the glass by the open window, and Mrs. Darrell got out and walked across the lawn towards the house.

She was a tall woman, unusually tall for a woman, and she was dressed in black silk, which hung about her angular limbs in heavy, lustreless folds. Eleanor could see that her face was pale and her eyes black and flashing.

The two girls went down stairs hand-in-hand. Tea was prepared in the dining room, a long wainscoted apartment older than the rest of the house, and rather gloomy looking. Three narrow windows upon one side of this room looked towards the shrubbery and grove at the back of the house, and the trunks of the trees looked gaunt and black in the spring twilight. A fire was burning upon the low hearth, and a maid-servant was lighting a lamp in the centre of the table as the two girls went in.

Mrs. Darrell welcomed her dependant very politely; but there was a harshness and a stiffness in her politeness which reminded Eleanor of her half-sister, Mrs. Bannister. The two women seemed to belong to the same school, Miss Vane thought.

The lamplight shone full upon Mrs. Darrell's face, and Eleanor could see now that the face was a handsome one, though faded and careworn. The widow's hair was grey, but her eyes retained the flashing brightness of youth. They were very dark and lustrous, but their expression was scarcely pleasant. There

was too much of the hawk or eagle in their penetrating glance.

But Laura Mason did not seem at all afraid of her protectress.

"Miss Vincent and I are good friends already, Mrs. Darrell," she said, gaily, "and we shall be as happy together as the day is long, I hope."

"And I hope Miss Vincent will teach you industrious habits, Laura," Mrs. Darrell answered gravely.

Miss Mason made a grimace with her pretty red under-lip.

Eleanor took the seat indicated to her, a seat at the end of the dining-table, and exactly opposite to Mrs. Darrell, who sat with her back to the fire-place.

Sitting here, Eleanor could scarcely fail to observe an oil painting — the only picture in the room — which hung over the mantelpiece. It was the portrait of a young man, with dark hair clustering about a handsome forehead, regular features, a pale complexion, and black eyes. The face was very handsome, very aristocratic, but there was a want of youthfulness, an absence of the fresh, eager spirit of boyhood in its expression. A look of listless hauteur hung like a cloud over the almost faultless features.

Mrs. Darrell watched Eleanor's eyes as the girl looked at this picture.

"You are looking at my son, Miss Vincent," she said; "but perhaps it is scarcely necessary to tell you so. People say there is a strong likeness between us.

There was indeed a very striking resemblance between the faded face below and the pictured face above. But it seemed to Eleanor Vane as if the mother's face, faded and careworn though it was, was almost

the younger of the two. The listless indifference, the utter lack of energy in the lad's countenance, was so much the more striking when contrasted with the youthfulness of the features.

"Yes," exclaimed Laura Mason, "that is Mrs. Darrell's only son, Launcelot Darrell. Isn't that a romantic name, Miss Vincent?"

Eleanor started. This Launcelot Darrell was the young man she had heard her father speak of; the man who expected to inherit the De Crespigny estate. How often she had heard his name! It was he, then, who would have stood between her father and fortune, had that dear father lived; or whose claim of kindred would, perhaps, have had to make way for the more sacred right of friendship.

And this young man's portrait was hanging in the room where she sat. He lived in the house, perhaps. Where should he live except in his mother's house?

But Eleanor's mind was soon relieved upon this point, for Laura Mason, in the pauses of the business of the tea-table, talked a good deal about the original of the portrait.

"Don't you think him handsome, Miss Vincent?" she asked, without waiting for an answer. "But of course you do; everybody thinks him handsome; and then Mrs. Darrell says he's so elegant, so tall, so aristocratic. He is almost sure to have Woodlands by-and-bye, and all Mr. de Crespigny's money. But of course you don't know Woodlands or Mr. de Crespigny. How should you, when you've never been in Berkshire before? And he — not Mr. de Crespigny, he's a nasty, fidgety, hypochron — what's it's name — old man? — but Launcelot Darrell is so accomplished. He's an

artist, you know, and all the water-coloured sketches in the drawing-room and the breakfast-parlour are his; and he plays and sings, and he dances exquisitely, and he rides and plays cricket, and he's a — what you may call it — a crack shot; and in short, he's an Admirable Crichton. You musn't fancy I'm in love with him, you know, Miss Vincent," the young lady added, blushing and laughing, "because I never saw him in my life, and I only know all this by hearsay."

"You never saw him!" repeated Eleanor.

Launcelot Darrell did not live at Hazlewood, then.

"No," the widow interposed; "my son has enemies, I am sorry to say, amongst his own kindred. Instead of occupying the position his talents, to say nothing of his birth, entitle him to, he has been compelled to go out to India in a mercantile capacity. I do not wonder that his spirit rebels against such an injustice. I do not wonder that he cannot forgive."

Mrs. Darrell's face darkened as she spoke, and she sighed heavily. By-and-by, when the two girls were alone together in the breakfast-room, Laura Mason alluded to the conversation at the tea-table.

"I don't think I ought to have talked about Launcelot Darrell," she said; "I know his mother is unhappy about him, though I don't exactly know why. You see his two aunts who live at Woodlands are nasty, scheming old maids, and they contrived to keep him away from his great-uncle, Mr. de Crespigny, who is expected to leave him all his money. Indeed, I don't see who else he can leave it to now. There was an old man — a college friend of Mr. de Crespigny's — who expected to get the Woodlands estate; but of course that was an absurd idea; and the old man —

the father of that very Mrs. Bannister who recommended you to Mrs. Darrell, by-the-by, is dead. So all chance of that sort of thing is over."

"And Mr. Launcelot Darrell is sure to have the fortune?" Eleanor said, interrogatively, after a very long pause.

"Well, I don't know about that; but I've heard Mrs. Darrell say that Launcelot was a great favourite of Mr. de Crespigny's when he was a boy. But those two cantankerous old-maids, Mrs. Darrell's sisters, are nagging at the old man night and day, and they may persuade him at last, or they may have succeeded in persuading him, perhaps, ever so long ago, to make a will in their favour. Of course all this makes Mrs. Darrell very unhappy. She idolises her son, who is an only child, and was terribly spoiled when he was a boy, they say; and she does not know whether he will be a rich man or a pauper."

"And in the meantime, Mr. Darrell is in India?"

"Yes. He went to India three years ago. He's overseer to an indigo-planter up the country at some place with an unpronounceable name, hundreds and hundreds of miles from Calcutta. He's not at all happy, I believe, and he very seldom writes — not above once in a twelvemonth."

"He is not a good son, then," Eleanor said.

"Oh, I don't know about that! Mrs. Darrell never complains, and she's very proud of him. She always speaks of him as 'my son.' But, of course, what with one thing and another, she is often very unhappy. So, if she is a little severe, now and then, we'll try and bear with her, won't we, Eleanor? I may call you Eleanor, mayn't I?"

The pretty flaxen head dropped upon Miss Vane's shoulder, as the heiress asked this question, and the blue eyes were lifted pleadingly.

"Yes, yes; I would much rather be called Eleanor than Miss Vincent."

And you'll call me Laura. Nobody ever calls me Miss Mason except Mr. Monckton when he lectures me. We shall be very, very happy together, I hope, Eleanor."

"I hope so, dear."

There was a sudden pang of mingled fear and remorse at Eleanor Vane's heart as she said this. Was she to be happy, and to forget the purpose of her life? Was she to be happy, and false to the memory of her murdered father? In this quiet country life; in this pleasant girlish companionship which was so new to her; was she to abandon that one dark dream, that one deeply-rooted desire which had been in her mind ever since her father's untimely death?

She recoiled with a shudder of dread from the simple happiness which threatened to lull her to a Sybarite rest; in which that deadly design might lose its force, and, little by little, fade out of her mind.

She disengaged herself from the slight arms which had encircled her in a half-childish caress, and rose suddenly to her feet.

"Laura," she cried, "Laura, you mustn't talk to me like this. My life is not like yours. I have something to do, — I have a purpose to achieve; a purpose before which every thought of my mind, every impulse of my heart, must give way."

"What purpose, Eleanor?" asked Laura Mason, almost alarmed by the energy of her companion's manner.

"I cannot tell you. It is a secret," Miss Vane replied.

Then sitting down once more in the deep window-seat by Laura's side Eleanor Vane drew her arm tenderly round the frightened girl's waist.

"I'll try and do my duty to you, Laura, dear," she said, "and I know I shall be happy with you. But if ever you see me dull and silent, you'll understand, dear, that there is a secret in my life, and that there is a hidden purpose in my mind that sooner or later must be achieved. Sooner or later," she repeated, with a sigh, "but Heaven only knows when."

She was silent and absent-minded during the rest of the evening, though she played one of her most elaborate fantasias at Mrs. Darrell's request, and perfectly satisfied that lady's expectations by the brilliancy of her touch. She was very glad when, at ten o'clock, the two women servants of the simple household and a hobadahoyish young man, who looked after the pony and pigs and poultry-yard, and smelt very strongly of the stable, came in to hear prayers read by Mrs. Darrell.

"I know you're tired, dear," Laura Mason said, as she bade Eleanor good night at the door of her bedroom, "so I won't ask you to talk to me to-night. Get to bed, and go to sleep at once, dear."

But Eleanor did not go to bed immediately; nor did she fall asleep until very late that night.

She unfastened one of her trunks, and took from it a little locked morocco casket, which held a few valueless and old-fashioned trinkets that had been her mother's, and the crumpled fragment of her father's last letter.

She sat at the little dressing-table, reading the disjointed sentences in that melancholy letter, before she undressed, and then replaced the scrap of paper in the casket.

She looked at the lawn and shrubbery. The shining leaves of the evergreens trembled in the soft April breeze, and shimmered in the moonlight. All was silent in that simple rustic retreat. The pale branches of the tall trees near the low white gates were sharply defined against the sky. High up in the tranquil heavens the full moon shone out from a pale background of fleecy cloud.

The beauty of the scene made a very powerful impression upon Eleanor Vane. The window from which she had been accustomed to look in Bloomsbury abutted on a yard, a narrow gorge of dirt and disorder, between the dismal back walls of high London houses.

"I ought never to have come here," Eleanor thought bitterly, as she let fall her dimity window curtain and shut out the splendour of the night.

"I ought to have stayed in London; there was some hope of my meeting that man in London, where strange things are always happening. But here—"

She fell into a gloomy reverie. Secluded in that quiet rustic retreat, what hope could she have of advancing, by so much as one footstep, upon the dark road she had appointed for herself to tread?

It was very long before she fell asleep. She lay for hours, tumbling and tossing feverishly upon her comfortable bed.

The memories of her old life mingled themselves with thoughts of her new existence. She was haunted now by the recollection of her father, and her father's death; now by her fresh experiences of Hazlewood, by the widow's grey hair and penetrating gaze, and by the pictured face of Launcelot Darrell.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Prodigal's Return.

THE course of Eleanor's life at Hazlewood was peaceful and monotonous. She had been engaged simply as a "companion" for Laura Mason. That common epithet which is so often twisted into the signification of a household drudge — an upper-servant, who works harder than any of her fellows — in this case meant purely and simply what it was originally intended to mean. Eleanor's only duties were to teach Laura Mason music, and to be the companion and associate of all her girlish pleasures and industries.

Not that Miss Mason was very industrious. She had a habit of beginning great undertakings in the way of fancy work, and the more gigantic the design the more ardent was her desire to attempt it — but she rarely got beyond the initiative part of her labour. There was always some "Dweller on the Threshold" in the shape of a stitch that couldn't be learnt, or a skein of silk that couldn't be matched, or a pattern that *wouldn't* come right; and one after another of the gigantic undertakings was flung aside to decay in dusty oblivion, or to be finished by Eleanor or Mrs. Darrell.

Laura Mason was not made for the active service of life. She was one of the holiday soldiers in the great army, fit for nothing but to wear gilded epaulettes and gorgeous uniforms, and to turn out upon gala days to the sound of trumpet and drum.

She was a loving, generous-hearted, confiding creature; but, like some rudderless boat drifting hither and

thither before a stormy ocean, this frivolous, purposeless girl flung herself, helpless and dependent, upon the mercy of other people.

The rich City solicitor, Mr. Monckton, the head of a celebrated legal firm familiar in the Bankruptcy Court, took the trouble to say very little about his pretty, flaxen-haired, and blue-eyed ward.

He spoke of her, indeed, with an almost pointed indifference. She was the daughter of some people he had known in his early youth, he said, and her fortune had been entrusted to his care. She would be rich, but he was none the less anxious about her future. A woman was not generally any the safer in this world for being an heiress. This was all Gilbert Monckton had ever said to Mrs. Darrell upon the subject of his ward's past history. Laura herself had talked freely enough of her first two homes. There was little to tell, but, upon the other hand, there seemed nothing to conceal.

Upon one subject Mr. Monckton was very strict, and that was the seclusion of the home he had chosen for his ward.

"When Miss Mason is of age she will of course choose for herself," he said; "but until that time comes I must beg, Mrs. Darrell, that you will keep her out of all society."

Under these circumstances it was especially necessary that Laura Mason should have a companion of her own age. Hazlewood was a hermitage, never approached by any visitors except some half-dozen elderly ladies, who were intimate with Mrs. Darrell, and Mr. Monckton, who came about once a fortnight to dine and spend the evening.

He used to devote himself very much to Laura and her companion during these visits. Eleanor could see how earnestly he watched the flaxen-haired girl, whose childish simplicity no doubt made her very bewitching to the grave man of business. He watched her and listened to her; sometimes with a pleased smile, sometimes with an anxious expression on his face; but his attention very rarely wandered from her.

"He must love her very dearly," Eleanor thought, remembering how earnestly he had spoken in the railway carriage.

She wondered what was the nature of the affection which the solicitor felt for his ward. He was old enough to be her father, it was true, but he was still in the prime of life; he had not that beauty of feature and complexion which a school-girl calls handsome, but he had a face which leaves its impress upon the minds of those who look at it.

He was very clever, or at least he seemed so to Eleanor; for there was no subject ever mentioned, no topic ever discussed, with which he did not appear thoroughly familiar, and upon which his opinions were not original and forcible. Eleanor's intellect expanded under the influence of this superior masculine intelligence. Her plastic mind, so ready to take any impression, was newly moulded by its contact with this stronger brain. Her education, very imperfect before, seemed to complete itself now by this occasional association with a clever man.

Of course all this came about by slow degrees. She did not very rapidly become familiar with Gilbert Monckton, for his grave manner was rather calculated to inspire diffidence in a very young woman; but little

by little, as she grew accustomed to his society, accustomed to sit quietly in the shade, only speaking now and then, while Laura Mason talked familiarly to her guardian, she began to discover how much she had gained from her association with the lawyer. It was not without some bitterness of spirit that Eleanor Vane thought of this. She felt as if she had been an interloper in that quiet Hazlewood household. What right had she to come between Laura and her guardian, and steal the advantages Mr. Monckton intended for his ward? It was for Laura's sake he had been earnest or eloquent; it was for Laura's benefit he had described this, or explained that. What right, then, had she, Eleanor, to remember what Laura had forgotten, or to avail herself of the advantages Laura was too frivolous to value?

There was a gulf between the two girls that could not be passed, even by affection. Eleanor Vane's mental superiority placed her so high above Laura Mason that perfect confidence could not exist between them. Eleanor's love for the light-hearted, heedless girl, had something almost motherly in its nature.

"I know we shall never quite understand each other, Laura," she said; "but I think I could give up my life for your sake, my dear."

"Or I for you, Nelly."

"No, no, Laura. I know you are unselfish as an angel, and you'd wish to do so; but yours is not the giving-up nature, my darling. You'd die under a great sorrow."

"I think I should, Nelly," the girl answered, drawing close to her friend, and trembling at the very thought of calamity; "but how you speak, dear. Had you ever a great sorrow?"

"Yes, a very great one."

"And yet you are happy with us, and can sing and play, and ramble about in the woods with me, Nell, as if you had nothing on your mind."

"Yes, Laura, but I can remember my sorrow all the time. It is hidden so deep in my heart that the sunshine never reaches it, however happy I may seem."

Laura Mason sighed. The spoiled child of fortune could not help wondering how she would act under the influence of a great misery. She would sit down upon the ground in some darkened room, she thought, and cry until her heart broke and she died.

The summer faded into autumn, and autumn into winter, and the early spring flowers bloomed again in the shrubberies and on the lawn at Hazlewood. The primroses were pale upon the tender grass of the sloping banks in the broad lane near the gates, and still no event had happened to break the tranquil monotony of that secluded household. Eleanor had grown familiar with every nook in the rambling old cottage; even with Launcelot Darrell's apartments, a suite of rooms on the bed-room floor, looking out into the grove at the back of the house. These rooms had been shut up for years, ever since Launcelot had sailed for India, and they had a desolate look, though fires were lighted in them periodically, and every scrap of furniture was kept carefully dusted.

"The rooms must always be ready," Mrs. Darrell said. "Mr. de Crespigny may die and my son may be called home suddenly."

So the three rooms, a bed-room, dressing-room, and sitting-room, were kept in perfect order, and Laura and Eleanor wandered into them sometimes, in the idleness

of a wet afternoon, and looked at the pictures upon the walls, the unfinished sketches piled one upon the top of another on the easel, or tried the little cottage piano, upon which Mr. Darrell had been wont to accompany himself when he sang. His mother always insisted upon the piano being tuned when the tuner came from Windsor to attend to Laura Mason's modern grand. The two girls used to talk a good deal of the widow's handsome son. They had heard him spoken of by his mother, by the servants, and by the few humble neighbours in scattered cottages near Hazlewood. They talked of his uncertain fortunes, his accomplishments, his handsome, haughty face which Laura declared was faultless.

Miss Vane had by this time been a twelvemonth at Hazlewood. Her eighteenth birthday was past, and the girlishness of her appearance had matured into the serene beauty of early womanhood. The golden tints of her hair had deepened into rich auburn, her gray eyes looked darker under the shadow of her dark brows. When she went to spend a brief Christmas holiday with her old friends, the Signora and Richard Thornton declared that she had altered very much since she had left them, and were surprised at her matured beauty. She bought a silk gown for Eliza Piccirillo, and the meerscham pipe for poor Dick, who needed no memorial of his adopted sister; for her image haunted him only too perpetually, to the destruction of all other images which might else have found a place in the scene-painter's heart.

Eleanor Vane felt a pang of remorse as she remembered how very easily she had borne her separation from these faithful friends. It was not that she

loved them less, or forgot their goodness to her. She had no such ingratitude as that wherewith to reproach herself; but she felt as if she had committed a sin against them in being happy in the calm serenity of Hazlewood.

She said this to Richard Thornton during the brief Christmas visit. They had walked out once more in the quiet streets and squares in the early winter twilight.

"I feel as if I had grown selfish and indifferent," she said. "The months pass one after another. It is two years and a half since my father died, and I am not one step nearer to the discovery of the man who caused his death. Not one step. I am buried alive at Hazlewood. I am bound hand and foot. What can I do, Richard; what can I do? I could go mad, almost, when I remember that I am a poor helpless girl, and that I may never be able to keep the oath I swore when I first read my dead father's letter. And you, Richard, in all this time you have done nothing to help me."

The scene-painter shook his head sadly enough.

"What can I do, my dear Eleanor? What I told you nearly a year ago, I tell you again now. This man will never be found. What hope have we? what chance of finding him? We might hear his name tomorrow, and we should not know it. If either of us met him in the street, we should pass him by. We might live in the same house with him, and be ignorant of his presence."

"No, Richard," cried Eleanor Vane. "I think if I met that man some instinct of hate and horror would reveal his identity to me."

"My poor romantic Nelly, you talk as if life was a melodrama. No, my dear, I say again, this man will never be found; the story of your father's death is unhappily a common one. Let that sad story rest, Nell, with all the other mournful records of the past. Believe me that you cannot do better than be happy at Hazlewood; happy in your innocent life, and utterly forgetful of the foolish vow you made when you were little better than a child. If all the improbabilities that you have ever dreamt of were to come to pass, and vengeance were in your grasp, I hope and believe, Nell, that a better spirit would arise within you, and prompt you to let it go."

Richard Thornton spoke very seriously. He had never been able to speak of Eleanor's scheme of retribution without grief and regret. He recognised the taint of her father's influence in this vision of vengeance and destruction. All George Vane's notions of justice and honour had been rather the meretricious and flimsy ideas of a stage play, than the common-sense views of real life. He had talked incessantly to his daughter about days of retribution; gigantic vengeance which were looming somewhere in the far-away distance, for the ultimate annihilation of the old man's enemies. This foolish, ruined spendthrift, who cried out against the world because his money was spent, and his place in that world usurped by wiser men, had been Eleanor's teacher during her most impressionable years. It was scarcely to be wondered at, then, that there were some flaws in the character of this motherless girl, and that she was ready to mistake a pagan scheme of retribution for the Christian duty of filial love.

Midsummer had come and gone, when an event occurred to break the tranquillity of that simple household.

The two girls had lingered late in the garden one evening early in July. Mrs. Darrell sat writing in the breakfast-parlour. The lamplight glimmered under the shadow of the verandah, and the widow's tall figure seated at her desk was visible through the open bay-window.

Laura and her companion had been talking for a long time, but Eleanor had lapsed into silence at last, and stood against the low white gate with her elbow resting upon the upper bar, looking thoughtfully out into the lane. Miss Mason was never the first to be tired of talking. A silvery torrent of innocent babble was for ever gushing from her red, babyish lips; so, when at last Eleanor grew silent and absent-minded, the heiress was fain to talk to her dogs; her darling silky Skye, whose great brown eyes looked out from a ball of floss silk that represented the animal's head; and her Italian greyhound, a slim shivering brute, who wore a coloured flannel paletot, and exhibited a fretful and whimpering disposition, far from agreeable to any one but his mistress.

There was no moon upon this balmy July night, and the hulking hobadahoy of all work came out to light the lamp while the two girls were standing at the gate. This lamp gave a pleasant aspect to the cottage upon dark nights, and threw a bright line of light into the obscurity of the lane.

The boy had scarcely retired with his short ladder and flaming lantern, when the two pet dogs began to bark violently, and a man came out of the darkness into the line of lamplight.

Laura Mason gave a startled scream; but Eleanor caught her by the arm, to check her foolish outcry.

There was nothing very alarming in the aspect of the man. He was only a tramp: not a common beggar, but a shabby-genteel-looking tramp, whose threadbare coat was of a fashionable make, and who, in spite of his ragged slovenliness, had something the look of a gentleman.

"Mrs. Darrell still lives here, does she not?" he asked rather eagerly.

"Yes."

It was Eleanor who answered. The dogs were still barking, and Laura was still looking very suspiciously at the stranger.

"Will you tell her, please, that she is wanted out here by some one who has something important to communicate to her," the man said.

Eleanor was going towards the house to deliver this message, when she saw Mrs. Darrell coming across the lawn. She had been disturbed at her writing by the barking of the dogs.

"What is the matter, Miss Vincent," she asked, sharply. "Who are you and Laura talking to, out here?"

She walked from the two girls to the man, who stood back a little way outside the gate, with the lamplight shining full upon his face.

The widow looked sternly at this man who had dared to come to the gate at nightfall and to address the two girls under her charge.

But her face changed as she looked at him, and a wild cry broke from her lips.

"Launcelot, Launcelot, my son!"

CHAPTER XV.

Launcelot.

MRS. DARRELL stood for some time clasped in her son's embrace, and sobbing violently. The two girls withdrew a few paces, too bewildered to know what to do, in the first shock of the surprise that had come so suddenly upon them.

This was Launcelot Darrell, then, the long absent son, whose portrait hung above the mantelpiece in the dining-room, whose memory was so tenderly cherished, every token of whose former presence was so carefully preserved.

"My boy, my boy," murmured the widow, in a voice which seemed strange to the two girls, from its new accent of tenderness; "my own and only son, how is it that you come back to me thus? I thought you were in India. I thought—"

"I was in India, mother, when my last letter to you was written," the young man answered; "but you know how sick and tired I was of the odious climate, and the odious life I was compelled to lead. It grew unbearable at last, and I determined to throw everything up, and come home; so I sailed in the first vessel that left Calcutta after I had formed this determination. You're not sorry to see me back, are you, mother?"

"Sorry to see you, Launcelot!"

Mrs. Darrell led her son across the lawn and into the house, through an open window. She seemed

utterly unconscious of the presence of her two charges. She seemed to have forgotten their very existence in the wonderful surprise of her son's return. So Laura and Eleanor went up to Miss Mason's room and shut themselves in to talk over the strange adventures of the evening, while the mother and son were closeted together in the breakfast-room below.

"Isn't it all romantic, Nelly, dear?" Miss Mason said, with enthusiasm. "I wonder whether he came all the way from India in that dreadful coat and that horrid shabby hat? He looks just like the hero of a novel, doesn't he, Nell? dark and pale, and tall and slender. Has he come back for good, do you think? I'm sure he ought to have Mr. De Crespigny's fortune."

Miss Vane shrugged her shoulders. She was not particularly interested in the handsome prodigal son who had made his appearance so unexpectedly; and she had enough to do to listen to all Laura's exclamations, and sympathise with her curiosity.

"I shan't sleep a bit to-night, Nelly," Miss Mason said, as she parted from her friend. "I shall be dreaming of Launcelot Darrell, with his dark eyes and pale face. What a fierce, half-angry look he has, Nell, as if he were savage with the world for having treated him badly. For he must have been badly treated, you know. We know how clever he is. He ought to have been made a governor-general, or an ambassador, or something of that kind, in India. He has no right to be shabby."

"I should think his shabbiness was his own fault, Laura," Miss Vane answered, quietly. "If he is clever, you know, he ought to be able to earn money."

She thought of Richard Thornton, as she spoke,

working at the Phoenix Theatre for the poor salary that helped to support the Bohemian comforts of that primitive shelter in the Pilasters; and Dick's paint and whitewash bespattered coat seemed glorified by contrast with that of the young prodigal in the room below.

The two girls went down to the breakfast-room early the next morning, Laura Mason arrayed in her prettiest and brightest muslin morning dress, which was scarcely so bright as her beaming face. The young lady's gossamer white robes fluttered with the floating ribbons and delicate laces that adorned them. She was a coquette by nature, and was eager to take her revenge for all the monotonous days of enforced seclusion which she had endured.

Mrs. Darrell was sitting at the breakfast table when the two girls entered the room. Her Bible lay open amongst the cups and saucers near her. Her face was pale. She looked even more careworn than usual; and her eyes were dimmed by the tears that she had shed. The heroism of the woman had who borne her son's absence silently and uncomplainingly, had given way under the unlooked-for joy of his return.

She gave her hand to each of the girls as they wished her good morning. Eleanor almost shuddered as she felt the deadly coldness of that wasted hand.

"We will begin breakfast at once, my dears," Mrs. Darrell said, quietly; "my son is fatigued by a long journey, and exhausted by the excitement of his return. He will not get up, therefore, until late in the day."

The widow poured out the tea, and for some little time there was silence at the breakfast table. Neither Eleanor nor Laura liked to speak. They both waited

— one patiently, the other very impatiently — until Mrs. Darrell should please to tell them something about her son's extraordinary return.

It seemed as if the mistress of Hazlewood, usually so coldly dignified and self-possessed, felt some little embarrassment in speaking of the strange scene of the previous night.

"I need scarcely tell you, Laura," she said, rather abruptly, after a very long pause, "that if anything could lessen my happiness in my son's return, it would be the manner of his coming back to his old home. He comes back to me poorer than when he went away. He came on foot from Southampton here; he came looking like a tramp and a beggar to his mother's house. But it would be hard if I blamed my poor boy for this. The sin lies at his uncle's door. Maurice de Crespigny should have known that Colonel Darrell's only son would never stoop to a life of commercial drudgery. Launcelot's letters might have prepared me for what has happened. Their brevity, their bitter, despondent tone, might have told the utter hopelessness of a commercial career for my son. He tells me that he left India because his position there — a position which held out no promise of improvement — had become unbearable. He comes back to me penniless, with the battle of life before him. You can scarcely wonder, then, that my happiness in his return is not unalloyed."

"No, indeed, dear Mrs. Darrell," Laura answered, eagerly; "but still you must be very glad to have him back; and if he didn't make a fortune in India, he can make one in England, I dare say. He is so handsome, and so clever, and —"

The young lady stopped suddenly, blushing under the cold scrutiny of Ellen Darrell's eyes. Perhaps in that moment a thought flashed across the mind of the widow; the thought of a wealthy marriage for her handsome son. She knew that Laura Mason was rich, for Mr. Monckton had told her that his ward would have all the advantages in after life which wealth can bestow; but she had no idea of the amount of the girl's fortune.

Launcelot Darrell slept late after his pedestrian journey. Miss Mason's piano was kept shut, out of consideration for the traveller; and Laura and Eleanor found the bright summer's morning unusually long. They had so few pursuits, or amusements, that to be deprived of one seemed very cruel. They were sitting after their early dinner, in a shady nook in the shrubbery, Laura lying on the ground, reading a novel, and Eleanor engaged in some needle-work achievement which was by-and-by to be presented to the Signora; when the rustling leaves of the laurel screen that enclosed and sheltered their retreat, were parted, and the handsome face, the face which had looked worn and haggard last night, but which now had only an aristocratic air of languor, presented itself before them in a frame of dark foliage.

"Good morning, or good afternoon, young ladies," said Mr. Darrell, "for I hear that your habits at Hazlewood are very primitive, and that you dine at three o'clock. I have been looking for you during the last half-hour, in my anxiety to apologise for any alarm I may have given you last night. When the landless heir returns to his home, he scarcely expects to find two angels waiting for him on the threshold. I might have been a little more careful of my toilet, had I been

able to foresee my reception. What luggage I had I left at Southampton."

"Oh! never mind your dress, Mr. Darrell," Laura answered gaily, "we are both so glad you have come home. Ain't we, Eleanor? for our lives are so dreadfully dull here, though your mamma is very kind to us. But do tell us all about your voyage home, and your journey here on foot, and all the troubles you have gone through? Do tell us your adventures, Mr. Darrell?"

The young lady lifted her bright blue eyes with a languishing glance of pity; but suddenly dropped them under the young man's gaze. He looked from one to the other of the two girls, and then, strolling into the grassy little amphitheatre where they were sitting, flung himself into a rustic arm-chair, near the table at which Eleanor Vane sat at work.

Launcelot Darrell was a handsome likeness of his mother. The features which in her face were stern and hard, had in his an almost feminine softness. The dark eyes had a lazy light in them, and were half-hidden by the listless droop of the black lashes that fringed their full white lids. The straight nose, low forehead, and delicately moulded mouth, were almost classical in their physical perfection; but there was a something wanting in the lower part of the face; the chin receded a little where it should have projected, the handsome mouth was weak and undecided in expression.

Mr. Darrell might have sat as a painter's model for all the lovers in prose or poetry; but he would never have been mistaken for a hero or a statesman. He had all the attributes of grace and beauty, but not

one of the outward signs of greatness. Eleanor Vane felt this want of power in the young man as she looked at him. Her rapid perception seized upon the one defect which marred so much perfection.

"If I had need of help against the murderer of my father," the girl thought, "I would not ask this man to aid me."

"And now, Mr. Darrell," said Laura, throwing down her book, and settling herself for a flirtation with the prodigal son, "tell us all your adventures. We are dying to hear them."

Launcelot Darrell shrugged his shoulders.

"What adventures, my dear Miss Mason?"

"Why, your Indian experiences, of course, and your journey home. All your romantic escapes, and thrilling perils, tiger-hunting, pig-sticking — that doesn't sound romantic, but I suppose it is — lonely nights in which you lost yourself in the jungle, horrible encounters with rattlesnakes, brilliant balls at Government House — you see I know all about Indian life — rides on the race-course, flirtations with Calcutta belles."

The young man laughed at Miss Mason's enthusiasm.

"You know more about the delights of an Indian existence than I do," he said, rather bitterly; "a poor devil who goes out to Calcutta with only one letter of introduction, and an empty purse, and is sent up the country, within a few days of his arrival, to a lonely station, where his own face is about the only white one in the neighbourhood, hasn't very much chance of becoming familiar with Government House festivities, or Calcutta belles, who reserve their smiles for the

favoured children of fortune, I can assure you. As to tiger-hunts and pig-sticking, my dear Miss Mason, I can give you very little information upon those points, for an indigo-planter's overseer, whose nose is kept pretty close to the grindstone, has enough to do for his pitiful stipend, and very little chance of becoming a Gordon Cumming or a Jules Gerard."

Laura Mason looked very much disappointed.

"You didn't like India, then, Mr. Darrell?" she said.

"I hated it," the young man answered, between his set teeth.

There was so much suppressed force in Launcelot Darrell's utterance of these three words, that Eleanor looked up from her work, startled by the young man's sudden vehemence.

He was looking straight before him, his dark eyes fixed, his strongly marked eyebrows contracted, and a red spot burning in the centre of each pale and rather hollow cheek.

"But why did you hate India?" Laura asked, with unflinching pertinacity.

"Why does a man hate poverty and humiliation, Miss Mason? You might as well ask me that. Suppose we drop the subject. It isn't a very agreeable one to me, I assure you."

"But your voyage home," pursued Laura, quite unabashed by this rebuff; "you can tell us your adventures during the voyage home."

"I had no adventures. Men who travel by the overland route may have something to tell, perhaps: I came the cheapest and the slowest way."

"By a sailing vessel?"

"Yes."

"And what was the name of the vessel?"

"The Indus."

"The Indus, that's an easy name to remember. But of course you had all sorts of amusements on board; you played whist in the cuddy — what is the cuddy, by-the-bye? — and you got up private theatricals, and you started an amateur newspaper, or a magazine, and you crossed the line, and —"

"Oh, yes, we went through the usual routine. It was dreary enough. Pray tell me something about Hazlewood, Miss Mason; I am a great deal more interested in Berkshire than you can possibly be in my Indian experiences."

The young lady was fain to submit. She told Mr. Darrell such scraps and shreds of gossip as form the "news" in a place like Hazlewood. He listened very attentively to anything Miss Mason had to tell about his uncle, Maurice de Crespigny.

"So those tiger cats, my maiden aunts, are as watchful as ever," he said, when Laura had finished. "Heaven grant the harpies may be disappointed. Do any of the Vane family ever try to get at the old man?"

Eleanor looked up from her work, but very quietly; she had grown accustomed to hear her name spoken by those who had no suspicion of her identity.

"Oh, no, I believe not," Miss Mason answered; "old Mr. Vane died two or three years ago, you know."

"Yes, my mother wrote me word of his death."

"You were in India when it happened, then?"

"Yes."

Eleanor's face blanched, and her heart beat with a fierce heavy throbbing against her breast. How dared they talk of her dead father in that tone of almost insolent indifference. The one passion of her young life had as strong a power over her now as when she had knelt in the little chamber in the Rue de l'Archevêque, with her clasped hands uplifted to the low ceiling, and a terrible oath upon her girlish lips.

She dropped her work suddenly, and rising from her rustic seat, walked away from the shade of the laurels.

"Eleanor," cried Laura Mason, "where are you going?"

Launcelot Darrell sat in a lounging attitude, trifling with the reels of silk, and balls of wool, and all the paraphernalia of fancy work scattered upon the table before him, but he lifted his head as Laura uttered her friend's name, and perhaps for the first time looked steadily at Miss Vane.

He sat looking at her for some minutes while she and Laura stood talking together a few paces from him. It was perhaps only a painter's habit of looking earnestly at a pretty face that gave intensity to his gaze. He dropped his eyelids presently, and drew a long breath, that sounded almost like a sigh of relief.

"An accidental likeness," he muttered; "there are a hundred such likenesses in the world."

He got up and walked back to the house, leaving the two girls together. Laura had a great deal to say about his handsome face, and the easy grace of his manner; but Eleanor Vane was absent and thoughtful. The mention of her father's name had brought back

the past. Her peaceful life, and all its quiet contentment, melted away like a curtain of morning mist that rises to disclose the ghastly horror of a battle-field; and the dreadful picture of the past arose before her; painfully vivid, horribly real. The parting on the boulevard; the long night of agony and suspense; the meeting with Richard on the bridge by the Morgue; her father's torn, disjointed letter; and her own vengeful wrath; all returned to her. Every voice of her heart seemed to call her away from the common-place tranquillity of her life to some desperate act of justice and retribution.

"What have I to do with this frivolous girl?" she thought; "what is it to me whether Launcelot Darrell's nose is Grecian or aquiline, whether his eyes are black or brown? What a wretched, useless life I am leading in this place, when I should be hunting through the world for the murderer of my father."

She sighed wearily as she remembered how powerless she was. What could she do to get one step nearer to the accomplishment of that single purpose, which she called the purpose of her life? Nothing! She remembered with a chill feeling of despair that however, in her moments of exaltation, she might look forward to some shadowy day of triumph and revenge, her better sense always told her that Richard Thornton had spoken the truth. The man whose treachery had destroyed George Vane had dropped into the chaos of an over-crowded universe, leaving no clue behind him by which he might be traced.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Lawyer's Suspicion.

MR. MONCKTON came to Hazlewood upon the day after Launcelot Darrell's arrival. The grave solicitor had known the young man before his departure for India, but there seemed no very great intimacy between them, and Mr. Darrell appeared rather to avoid any familiarity with his mother's rich friend.

He answered Gilbert Monckton's questions about India and indigo-planting with an air of unwillingness that was almost insolent.

"The last few years of my life have not been so very pleasant as to make me care to look back at them," he said, bitterly. "Some men keep a diary of the experiences of each day—I found the experiences tiresome enough in themselves, and had no wish to incur the extra fatigue of writing about them. I told my uncle, when he forced a commercial career upon me, that he was making a mistake; and the result has proved that I was right."

Mr. Darrell spoke with as much gentlemanly indifference as if he had been discussing the affairs of a stranger. He evidently thought that the mistakes of his life rested upon other people's shoulders; and that it was no shame to him, but rather to his credit as a fine gentleman, that he had come home penniless and shabby to sponge upon his mother's slender income.

"And now you have come back, what do you mean to do?" Mr. Monckton asked, rather abruptly.

"I shall go in for painting. I'll work hard, down in this quiet place, and get a picture ready for the Royal Academy next year. Will you sit for me, Miss Mason? and you, Miss Vincent? you would make a splendid Rosalind and Celia. Yes, Mr. Monckton, I shall try the sublime art whose professors have been the friends of princes."

"And if you fail —"

"If I fail, I'll change my name, and turn itinerant portrait-painter. But I don't suppose my uncle Maurice means to live for ever. He must leave his money to somebody. If Providence favours me my respected aunts may happen to offend him a few hours before his death, and he may make a will in my favour, in order to revenge himself upon them. I think that's generally the way of it, eh, Mr. Monckton? The testator doesn't consider the delight of the person who *is* to get his money, but gloats over the aggravation of the poor wretch who *isn't*."

The young man spoke as carelessly as if the Woodlands fortune were scarcely worth a discussion. It was his habit to speak indifferently of all things, and it was rather difficult to penetrate his real sentiments, so skilfully were they hidden by this surface manner.

"You had a formidable rival once in your uncle's affections!" Mr. Monckton said presently.

"Which rival?"

"The Damon of Maurice de Crespigny's youth, George Vandeleur Vane."

Launcelot Darrell's face darkened at the mention of the dead man's name. It had always been the habit of the De Crespigny family to look upon Eleanor's

father as a subtle and designing foe, against whom no warfare could be too desperate.

"My uncle could never have been such a fool as to leave his money to that spendthrift," Mr. Darrell said.

Eleanor had been sitting at an open window busy with her work during this conversation; but she rose hastily as Launcelot spoke of her father. She was ready to do battle for him then and there, if need were. She was ready to fling off the disguise of her false name, and to avow herself as George Vane's daughter, if they dared to slander him. Whatever shame or humiliation was cast upon him should be shared by her.

But before she could give way to this sudden impulse, Gilbert Monckton spoke, and the angry girl waited to hear what he might say.

"I have every reason to believe that Maurice de Crespigny would have left his money to his old friend had Mr. Vane lived," the lawyer said. "I never shall forget your uncle's grief when he read the account of the old man's death in a 'Galignani' which was put purposely in his way by one of your aunts."

"Ah," said Mr. Darrell, bitterly, "George Vane's death cleared the way for those harpies."

"Or for you, perhaps."

"Perhaps. I have not come home to wait for a dead man's shoes, Mr. Monckton."

Mrs. Darrell had been listening to this conversation, with her watchful eyes fixed upon Gilbert Monckton's face. She spoke now for the first time.

"My son is the proper person to inherit my uncle's fortune," she said; "he is young, and has a bright

future before him. Money would be of some use to *him*; but it would be almost useless to my sisters."

She glanced at the young man as she spoke; and in that one kindling glance of maternal pride the widow revealed how much she loved her son.

The young man was leaning in a lounging attitude over the piano, turning the leaves of Laura's open music-book, and now and then striking his fingers on the notes.

Mr. Monckton took up his hat, shook hands with his ward and with Mrs. Darrell, and then went over to the window at which Eleanor sat.

"How silent you have been this morning, Miss Vincent," he said.

The girl blushed as she looked up at the lawyer's grave face. She always felt ashamed of her false name when Mr. Monckton addressed her by it.

"When are you and Laura coming to see my new picture?" he asked.

"Whenever Mrs. Darrell likes to bring us," Eleanor answered, frankly.

"You hear, Mrs. Darrell?" said the lawyer; "these two young ladies are coming over to Tolldale to see a genuine Raphael that I bought at Christie's a month ago. You will be taking your son to see his uncle, I have no doubt — suppose you come and lunch at the priory on the day you go to Woodlands."

"That will be to-morrow," answered Mrs. Darrell. "My uncle cannot deny himself to Launcelot after an absence of nearly five years, and even my sisters can scarcely have the impertinence to shut the door in my son's face."

"Very well; Woodlands and the Priory lie close

together. You can cross the park and get into Mr. de Crespigny's grounds by the wicket-gate, and so surprise the enemy. That will be the best plan."

"If you please, my dear Mr. Monckton," said the widow.

She was gratified at the idea of stealing a march upon her maiden sisters, for she knew how difficult it was to effect an entrance to the citadel so jealously guarded by them.

"Come, young ladies," exclaimed Mr. Monckton, as he crossed the threshold of the bay window, "will you honour me with your company to the gates?"

The two girls rose and went out on to the lawn with the lawyer. Laura Mason was accustomed to obey her guardian, and Eleanor was very well pleased to pay all possible respect to Gilbert Monckton. She looked up to him as something removed from the common-place sphere in which she felt so fettered and helpless. She fancied sometimes that if she could have told him the story of her father's death, he might have helped her to find the old man's destroyer. She had that implicit confidence in his power which a young and inexperienced woman almost always feels for a man of superior intellect who is twenty years her senior.

Mr. Monckton and the two girls walked slowly across the grass; but Laura Mason was distracted by her dogs before she reached the gate, and ran away into one of the shrubberied pathways after the refractory Italian greyhound.

The lawyer stopped at the gate. He was silent for some moments, looking thoughtfully at Eleanor, as if he had something particular to say to her.

"Well, Miss Vincent, how do you like Mr. Launcelot Darrell?" he asked at last.

The question seemed rather insignificant after the pause that had preceded it.

Eleanor hesitated.

"I scarcely know whether I like or dislike him," she said; "he only came the night before last, and —"

"And my question is what we call a leading one. Never mind, you shall tell me what you think by-and-by, when you have had more time to form an opinion. You think the young man handsome, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! very handsome."

"But you are not the girl to be fascinated by a handsome face. I can see that you mean that by the contemptuous curl of your lip. Quite true, no doubt, Miss Vincent; but there are some young ladies less strong-minded than yourself, who may be easily bewitched by the outline of a classical profile, or the light of a pair of handsome dark eyes. Eleanor Vincent, do you remember what I said to you when I brought you down to Hazlewood?"

Mr. Monckton was in the habit of addressing both the girls by their Christian names when he spoke seriously.

"Yes, I remember perfectly."

"What I said to you then implied an amount of trust which I don't often put in an acquaintance of a couple of hours. That little girl yonder," added the lawyer, glancing towards the pathway in which Laura Mason flitted about, alternately coaxing and remonstrating with her dogs, "is tender-hearted and weak-headed. I think you would willingly do anything to

serve her and me. You can do her no better service than by shielding her from the influence of Launcelot Darrell. Don't let my ward fall in love with the young man's handsome face, Miss Vincent!"

Eleanor was silent, scarcely knowing how to reply to this strange appeal.

"You think I am taking alarm too soon, I daresay," the lawyer said, "but in our profession we learn to look a long way ahead. I don't like the young man, Miss Vincent. He is selfish, and shallow, and frivolous: — false, I think, as well. And, more than this, there is a secret in his life.

"A secret?"

"Yes; and that secret is connected with his Indian experiences."

CHAPTER XVII.

The Shadow on Gilbert Monckton's life.

TOLLDALE PRIORY was a red brick mansion, lying deep in a valley, almost hidden amidst the thick woodland that surrounded it: a stately dwelling-place, shrouded and well-nigh entombed by the old trees that shut it in on every side, and made a screen through which only a glimpse of crimson brick could be seen from the bye-road or lane that approached the great iron gates.

From the hill-tops, high above that wooded valley, looking down into the sombre depths of verdure, one could see the gabled roof of the mansion, glimmering amid the woodland, like some rich jewel in its casket; and, at a little distance, the massive square tower of an ivy-grown old church, at which a few tenant-farmers about Tolldale, and the lords of the Priory and their retainers, were wont to worship.

The house was large and handsome; there was a long banqueting hall with a roof of black oak, rich in quaint carvings, and a gloomy corridor, which were said to belong to the reign of Henry the Second; but the rest of the mansion had been built in the time of Queen Anne, and was of that prim and square order of architecture which Sir John Vanbrugh and his followers affected.

The garden was prim and square, like the house, and shut in from the road by high red brick walls, over some part of which the stone-moss had crept, and the ivy trailed for centuries; but the garden had grown

out of the stiffness of Queen Anne's day, for every tree and shrub, every flower and weed, patch of grass, or cluster of ivy, grew so luxuriantly in this fertile valley, that it would have needed three times the number of gardeners that had been kept at Tolldale for the last twenty years, to preserve the neat order of the flower-beds and pathways, the holly hedges, the huge bushes of boxwood that had once been fashioned into the grim semblances of lions, swans, dragons, and elephants, and all the other stiff beauties of the pleasure-grounds.

Behind the house a couple of peacocks stalked moodily about a stony courtyard, and a great watchdog showed his sulky head at the mouth of his kennel, and barked incessantly at the advent of any visitor, as if the Priory had been some weird and enchanted dwelling to which no stranger had right of approach. The entrance to the house most commonly used, opened into this stony courtyard; and in the dusky, flagged hall, hung the ponderous and roomy riding-boots and the heavy saddle of some Tolldale who had distinguished himself in the civil wars.

The rainbow colours that glimmered on the stone pavement of this dusky entrance-hall were reflected from the crests and coats of arms, the interlaced ciphers, the coronets and bloody hands, emblazoned on the mullioned windows, whose splendour chastened and subdued the daylight; tempering the garish glory of heaven for the benefit of aristocratic eyes. But of all these crests and ciphers, of all these honourable insignia, not one belonged to the present owner of the house — Mr. Gilbert Monckton, the lawyer.

Tolldale Priory had changed hands several times

since the monkish days in which the older part of the house had been built. Gilbert Monckton had bought the estate twenty years before of a Mr. Ravenshaw, a reckless and extravagant gentleman, with an only daughter, whose beauty had been very much talked about in the neighbourhood. Indeed, report had gone so far as to declare that Gilbert Monckton had been desperately in love with this Margaret Ravenshaw, and that it was for her sake he had invested a great part of the splendid fortune left him by his father in the purchase of the Tolldale estate: thereby freeing the young lady's father from very terrible embarrassments, and enabling him to retire to the Continent with his only child.

There had been, certainly, considerable grounds for this report, as immediately after the transfer of the property, Gilbert Monckton quitted England, leaving his business in the hands of the two junior partners of the house — both much older men than himself, by-the-bye. He remained abroad for nearly two years; during which time everybody believed him to be travelling with Mr. Ravenshaw and his daughter, and at the end of that time returned; an altered man.

Yes; every one who had been intimate with Gilbert Monckton declared that a blight had fallen upon his life; and it was only natural that they should go a little further than this, and conclude that this change had been brought about by an unhappy attachment; or in plainer words, that Margaret Ravenshaw had jilted him.

However this might be, the lawyer kept his secret. There was no unmanly sentimentalism in his nature. Whatever his sorrow was, he bore it very quietly,

keeping it entirely to himself, and asking sympathy from no living creature. But from the hour of his return to England, he devoted himself to his profession with a determination and an assiduity that he had never before displayed.

This was the great change that his disappointment — whatever that disappointment may have been — had made in him. He did not become either a misanthrope or a bore. He became purely and simply a man of business. The frank, generous-hearted young squire, who had shunned his father's office as if every sheet of parchment or scrap of red tape had been infected by the pestilent vapours of a plague-stricken city, was transformed into a patient and plodding lawyer, whose gigantic grasp of thought and unfailing foresight were almost akin to genius.

For ten years Tolldale Priory was uninhabited by its new master, and left in the care of a snuff-taking old housekeeper, and a deaf gardener, who effectually kept all visitors at bay by a systematic habit of failing to hear the great bell at the iron gates; which might clang never so loudly under the shadow of its wooden pent-house without apparently producing the faintest impression upon the aural nerves of these two superannuated retainers. But at last the day came upon which Mr. Monckton grew tired of his London dwelling-place in a dingy square in Bloomsbury, and determined to take possession of his Berkshire estate. He sent a couple of upholsterers to Tolldale Priory, with strict injunctions to set the old furniture in order, but to do nothing more; not so much as to alter the adjustment of a curtain, or the accustomed position of a chair or table.

Perhaps he wished to see the familiar rooms looking exactly as they had looked when he had sat by Margaret Ravenshaw's side, a bright and hopeful lad of twenty. He kept the snuff-taking old housekeeper and the deaf gardener, and brought his own small staff of well-trained servants from London. The town-bred servants whole have willingly rebelled against their new dwelling-place, and the verdant shades that seemed to shut them in from the outer world; but their wages were too liberal to be resigned for any but a very powerful reason, and they submitted as best they could to the solitude of their new abode.

Mr. Monckton travelled backwards and forwards between Tolldale and London almost every day, driving to the station in his phaeton in the morning, and being met by his groom on his return in the evening. The lawyer's professional duties had taxed his strength to the utmost, and grave physicians had prescribed country air and occasional repose as absolutely necessary to him. For nearly ten years, therefore, he had lived at the Priory, forming few acquaintances, and positively no friends. His most intimate associates had been the De Crespignys. This had no doubt arisen from the circumstance of the Woodlands estate adjoining Tolldale. Mr. Monckton accepted the acquaintances whom accident forced upon him, but he sought none. Those who knew him best said that the shadow which had so early fallen upon his life had never passed away.

Of course Eleanor Vane had heard these things during her residence at Hazlewood. The knowledge of them invested the grave lawyer with a halo of romance in her girlish eyes. He, like herself, had his secret, and kept it faithfully.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Unforgotten.

MRS. DARRELL drove her son and the two girls to Tolldale Priory in accordance with Mr. Monckton's wish. The widow had no particular desire to bring either Laura or Eleanor into contact with her uncle, Maurice de Crespigny; for she nourished that intense jealousy of all visitors who crossed the threshold of the old man's house, which is only known to expectant heirs whose chances of a fortune tremble in the wavering balance of an invalid's caprice. But Mrs. Darrell could not afford to offend Mr. Monckton. He paid a high price for the protection of his ward, and was by no means the sort of man to be thwarted with impunity.

Launcelot Darrell lolled by his mother's side, smoking a cigar and taking very little notice of the blossoming hedgerows and glimpses of luxuriant pastoral landscape. The two young ladies sat upon a low seat, with their backs to the ponies, and had therefore ample opportunity of observing the prodigal son's face.

For the first time since Mr. Darrell's return Eleanor Vane did watch that handsome face, seeking in it for some evidence of those words which Gilbert Monckton had spoken to her the day before.

"He is selfish, and shallow, and frivolous; false, I think, as well; more than this, he has a secret — a secret connected with his Indian experiences."

This is what Mr. Monckton had said. Eleanor asked herself what right he had to say so much?

It was scarcely likely that a girl of Eleanor's age, so unaccustomed to all society, so shut in from the outer world by her narrow and secluded life, could fail to be a little interested in the handsome stranger, whose advent had not been without a tinge of romance. She was interested in him, and all the more so because of that which Gilbert Monckton had said to her. There was a secret in Launcelot Darrell's life. How strange this was! Had every creature a secret, part of themselves, hidden deep in their breasts, like that dark purpose which had grown out of the misery of her father's untimely death — some buried memory, whose influence was to overshadow all their lives?

She looked at the young man's face. It had an expression of half-defiant recklessness which seemed almost habitual to it; but it was not the face of a happy man.

Laura Mason was the only person who talked much during that drive to Tolldale. That young lady's tongue ran on in a pretty, incessant babble, about nothing in particular. The wild flowers in the hedge-rows, the distant glimpses of country, the light clouds floating in the summer sky, the flaming poppies among the ripening corn, the noisy fowl upon the margin of a pond, the shaggy horses looking over farm-yard gates, — every object, animate and inanimate, between Hazlewood and Tolldale, was the subject of Miss Mason's remark. Launcelot Darrell looked at her now and then with an expression of half-admiring amusement, and sometimes aroused himself to talk to her; but only

to relapse very quickly into a half-contemptuous, half-sulky silence.

Mr. Monckton received his guests in a long low library, looking out into the neglected garden; a dusky chamber, darkened by the shadows of trailing parasites that hung over the narrow windows. But this room was an especial favourite with the grave master of the house. It was here he sat during the lonely evenings that he spent at home. The drawing-rooms on the first-floor were only used upon those rare occasions when the lawyer opened his house to his friends of long standing, dashing clients, who were very well pleased to get a week's shooting in the woody coverts about the Priory.

Neither Laura nor Eleanor felt very enthusiastic about the Raphael, which seemed to the two girls to represent an angular and rather insipid type of female beauty, but Launcelot Darrell and his host entered into an artistic discussion that lasted until luncheon was announced by the lawyer's grey-haired butler; a ponderous and dignified individual who had lived with Gilbert Monckton's father, and who was said to know more about his master's history than Gilbert's most intimate friends.

It was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon when luncheon was finished, and the party set out to attempt an invasion upon Woodlands. Launcelot Darrell gave his arm to his mother, who in a manner took possession of her son, and the two girls walked behind with the lawyer.

"You have never seen Mr. de Crespigny, I suppose, Miss Vincent?" Gilbert Monckton said, as they went

out of the iron gates and struck into a narrow pathway leading through the wood.

"Never! But I am very anxious to see him."

"Why so?"

Eleanor hesitated. She was for ever being reminded of her assumed name, and the falsehood to which she had submitted out of deference to her half sister's pride.

Fortunately the lawyer did not wait for an answer to his question.

"Maurice de Crespigny is a strange old man," he said; "a very strange old man. I sometimes think there is a disappointment in store for Launcelot Darrell; and for his maiden aunts as well."

"A disappointment!"

"Yes, I doubt very much if either the maiden ladies or their nephews will get Maurice de Crespigny's fortune."

"But to whom will he leave it, then!"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not for me to answer that question, Miss Vincent," he said. "I merely speculate upon the chances, in perfect ignorance as to facts. Were I Mr. de Crespigny's legal adviser, I should have no right to say as much as this; but as I am not, I am free to discuss the business."

Mr. Monckton and Eleanor were alone by this time, for Laura Mason had flitted on to the party in advance, and was talking to Launcelot Darrell. The lawyer's face clouded as he watched his ward and the young man.

"You remember what I said to you yesterday, Miss Vincent?" he said, after a pause.

"Perfectly."

"I am very much afraid of the influence that young man's handsome face may have upon my poor frivolous ward. I would move her out of the way of that influence if I could, but where could I remove her? Poor child! she has been shifted about enough already. She seems happy at Hazlewood; very happy, with you."

"Yes," Eleanor answered, frankly; "we love each other very dearly."

"And you would do anything to serve her?"

"Anything in the world."

Mr. Monckton sighed.

"There is one way in which you might serve her," he said, in a low voice, as if speaking to himself rather than to Eleanor, "and yet—"

He did not finish the sentence, but walked on in silence, with his eyes bent upon the ground. He only looked up now and then to listen, with an uneasy expression, to the animated conversation of Launcelot and Laura. They walked thus through the shadowy woodland, where the rustling sound of a pheasant's flight amongst the brushwood, and the gay tones of Laura's voice, only broke the silence.

Beyond the wood they came to a grassy slope dotted by groups of trees, and bounded by an invisible wire fence.

Here, on the summit of a gentle elevation, stood a low white villa — a large and important house — but built in the modern style, and very inferior to Tolldale Priory in dignity and grandeur.

This was Woodlands, the house which Maurice de Crespigny had built for himself some thirty years be-

fore; the house whose threshold had so long been jealously guarded by the invalid's maiden nieces.

Mr. Monckton looked at his watch as he and Eleanor joined Mrs. Darrell.

"Half-past three o'clock," he said; "Mr. de Crespigny generally takes an airing in his Bath-chair at about this time in the afternoon. You see, I know the habits of the Citadel, and know therefore how to effect a surprise. If we strike across the park we are almost sure to meet him."

He led the way to a little gate in the fence. It was only fastened by a latch, and the party entered the grassy enclosure.

Eleanor Vane's heart beat violently. She was about to see her father's old and early friend; that friend whom George Vane had never been suffered to approach, to whom he had been forbidden to appeal in the hour of his distress.

"If my poor father could have written to Mr. de Crespigny for help when he lost that wretched hundred pounds, he might have been saved from a cruel death," Eleanor thought.

Fortune seemed to favour the invaders. In a shady avenue that skirted one side of the slope, they came upon the old man and the two sisters. The maiden ladies walked on either side of their uncle's Bath-chair, erect and formidable-looking as a couple of grenadiers.

Maurice de Crespigny looked twenty years older than his spendthrift friend had looked up to the hour of his death. His bent head nodded helplessly forward. His faded eyes seemed dim and sightless. The withered hand lying idle upon the leathern apron of the Bath-chair, trembled like a leaf shaken by the autumn wind.

The shadow of approaching death seemed to hover about this feeble creature, separating him from his fellow-mortals.

The two maiden ladies greeted their sister with no very demonstrative cordiality.

"Ellen!" exclaimed Miss Lavinia, the elder of the two, "this is an unexpected pleasure. I am sure that both Sarah and myself are charmed to see you; but as this is one of our poor dear invalid's worst days, your visit is rather unfortunately timed. If you had written, and given us notice of your coming —"

"You would have shut the door in my face," Mrs. Darrell said, resolutely. "Pray do not put yourself to the trouble of inventing any polite fictions on my account, Lavinia. We understand each other perfectly. I came here by the back way, because I knew I should be refused admittance at the front door. You keep watch well, Lavinia, and I beg to compliment you upon your patience."

The widow had approached her uncle's chair, leaving the rest of the party in the background. Pale and defiant, she did battle with her two sisters, fighting sturdily in the cause of her idolised son; who seemed a great deal too listless and indifferent to look after his own interests.

The ladies in possession glared at their sister's pale face with spiteful eyes; they were a little daunted by the widow's air of resolution.

"Who are these people, Ellen Darrell?" asked the younger of the two old maids. "Do you want to kill my uncle, that you bring a crowd of strangers to intrude upon him at a time when his nerves are at their worst?"

"I have not brought a crowd of strangers. One of these people is my son, who has come to pay his respects to his uncle after his return from India."

"Launcelot Darrell returned!" exclaimed the two ladies, simultaneously.

"Yes, returned to look after his own interests; returned with very grateful feelings towards those who prompted his being sent away from his native country to waste his youth in an unhealthy climate."

"*Some* people get on in India," Miss Lavinia de Crespigny said, spitefully; "but I never thought Launcelot Darrell would do any good there."

"How kind it was in you to advise his going, then," Mrs. Darrell answered promptly. Then passing by the astonished Miss Lavinia, she went up to her uncle, and bent over him.

The old man looked up at his niece, but with no glance of recognition in his blue eyes, which had grown pale with age.

"Uncle Maurice," said Mrs. Darrell, "don't you know me?"

The invalid nodded his head.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he said; but there was a vacant smile upon his face, and it seemed as if the words were uttered mechanically.

"And are you glad to see me, dear uncle?"

"Yes, yes, yes," the old man answered in exactly the same tone.

Mrs. Darrell looked up hopelessly.

"Is he always like this?" she asked.

"No," answered Miss Sarah, briskly, "he is only so when he is intruded upon and annoyed. We told you

it was one of your uncle's bad days, Ellen; and yet you are heartless enough to insist on persecuting him.

Mrs. Darrell turned upon her sister with suppressed rage.

"When will the day come in which I shall be welcome to this place, Sarah de Crespigny?" she said. "I choose my own time, and seize any chance I can of speaking to my uncle."

She looked back at the group she had left behind her, and beckoned to her son.

Launcelot Darrell came straight to his uncle's chair.

"You remember Launcelot, Uncle Maurice," Mrs. Darrell said entreatingly; "I'm sure you remember Launcelot."

The two maiden sisters watched their uncle's face with eager and jealous glances. It seemed as if the thick clouds were clearing away from the old man's memory, for a faint light kindled in his faded eyes.

"Launcelot!" he said; "yes, I remember Launcelot. In India, poor lad, in India."

"He went to India, dear uncle, and he has been away some years. You remember how unfortunate he was: the indigo planter to whom he was to have gone failed before he got to Calcutta, so that my poor boy could not even deliver the one letter of introduction which he took with him to a strange country. He was thrown upon his own resources, therefore, and had to get a living as he could. The climate never agreed with him, Uncle Maurice, and he was altogether very unhappy. He stayed in India as long as he could endure a life that was utterly unsuited to him; and then flung everything up for the sake of returning to

England. You must not be angry with my poor boy, dear Uncle Maurice."

The old man seemed to have brightened up a good deal by this time. He nodded perpetually as his niece talked to him, but there was a look of intelligence in his face now.

"I am not angry with him," he said; "he was free to go; or free to return. I did the best I could for him; but of course he was free to choose his own career, and is so still. I don't expect him to defer to me."

Mrs. Darrell turned pale. This speech appeared to express a renunciation of all interest in her son. She would almost rather that her uncle had been angry and indignant at the young man's return.

"But Launcelot wishes to please you in all he does, dear uncle," pleaded the widow. "He will be very, very sorry if he has offended you."

"He is very good," the old man answered; "he has not offended me. He is quite free, quite free to act for himself. I did the best I could for him — I did the best; but he is perfectly free."

The two maiden sisters exchanged a look of triumph. In this hand-to-hand contest for the rich man's favour, it did not seem as if either Ellen Darrell or her son were gaining any great advantage.

Launcelot bent over his great-uncle's chair.

"I am very happy to find you alive and well, sir, on my return," he said, respectfully.

The old man lifted his eyes, and looked earnestly at the handsome face bent over him.

"You are very good, nephew," he said; "I sometimes think that, because I have a little money to leave

behind me, everybody wishes for my death. It's hard to fancy that every breath one draws is grudged by those who live with us. That's very hard!"

"Uncle!" cried the maiden nieces, simultaneously, with a little shriek of lady-like horror. "When have you ever fancied that?"

The old man shook his head, with a feeble smile upon his tremulous lips.

"You are very good to me, my dears," he said, "very good; but sick men have strange fancies. I sometimes think I've lived too long for myself and others. But never mind that; never mind that. Who are those people there?" he asked, in a different tone.

"Friends of mine, uncle," Mrs. Darrell answered; "and one of them is a friend of yours. You know Mr. Monckton?"

"Monckton! O, yes — yes! Monckton, the lawyer," muttered the old man; "and who is that girl yonder?" he cried suddenly, with quite an altered voice and manner, almost as if the shock of some great surprise had galvanised him into new life. "Who is that girl yonder, with fair hair and her face turned this way? Tell me who she is, Ellen Darrell?"

He pointed to Eleanor Vane as he spoke. She was standing a little way apart from Gilbert Monckton and Laura; she had taken off her broad straw hat and slung it across her arm, and the warm summer breeze had swept the bright auburn hair from her forehead. Forgetful of every necessity for caution, in the intensity of her desire to see her dead father's dearest friend, she had advanced a few paces from her companions, and stood watching the group about the old man's chair.

"Who is she, Ellen Darrell?" repeated Mr. de Crespigny.

Mrs. Darrell looked almost frightened by her uncle's eagerness.

"That young lady is only the musical instructress of another young lady I have in my care, Uncle Maurice," she answered. "What is there in her that attracts your attention?"

The old man's eyes filled with tears that rolled slowly down his withered cheeks.

"When George Vane and I were students together at Maudlin," answered Maurice de Crespigny, "my friend was the living image of that girl."

Mrs. Darrell turned sharply round; and looked at Eleanor, as if she would have almost annihilated the girl for daring to resemble George Vane.

"I think your eyes must deceive you, my dear uncle," said the widow; "I knew Mr. Vane well enough, and I never saw any likeness to him in this Miss Vincent."

Maurice de Crespigny shook his head.

"My eyes do not deceive me," he said. "It's my memory that's weak sometimes; my eyesight is good enough. When you knew George Vane his hair was grey, and his handsome looks faded; when I first knew him he was as young as that girl yonder, and he was like her. Poor George! poor George!"

The three sisters looked at each other. Whatever enmity might exist between Mrs. Darrell and the two maiden ladies, the three were perfectly agreed upon one point — namely, that the recollection of George Vane and his family must, at any price, be kept out of Maurice de Crespigny's mind.

The old man had not spoken of his friend for years, and the maiden sisters had triumphed in the thought that all memories of their uncle's youth had become obscured and obliterated by the gathering shadows of age. But now, at the sight of a fair-haired girl of eighteen, the old memories came back in all their force. The sudden outburst of feeling came upon the sisters like a thunderbolt, and they lost that common instinct of self-preservation, that ordinary presence of mind, which would have prompted them to hustle the old man off, and carry him at once out of the way of this tiresome, intrusive, fair-haired young woman, who had the impertinence to resemble George Vane.

The sisters had never heard of the birth of Mr. Vane's youngest daughter. Many years had elapsed since the intercourse between Mrs. Darrell and Hortensia Bannister had extended to more than an occasional epistolary communication, and the stockbroker's widow had not thought it necessary to make any formal announcement of her half-sister's birth.

"Tell that girl to come here," cried Maurice de Crespigny, pointing with a trembling hand to Eleanor. "Let her come here; I want to look at her."

Mrs. Darrell thought it would be scarcely wise to oppose her uncle.

"Miss Vincent!" she called, sharply, to the girl; "come here, if you please, my uncle wishes to speak to you."

Eleanor Vane was startled by the widow's summons, but she came eagerly to the old man's chair. She was very anxious to see the friend of her dead father. She went close up to the Bath-chair, and stood beside the old man.

Maurice de Crespigny laid his hand upon hers.

"Yes," he said; "yes, yes. It's almost the same face — almost the same. God bless you, my dear! It makes me fifty years younger to look at you. You are like a friend who was once very dear to me — very dear to me. God bless you!"

The girl's face grew pale with the intensity of her feeling. Oh! that her father had been alive; that she might have pleaded for him with this old man, and have reunited the broken links of the past. But of what avail now were Maurice de Crespigny's compassionate words? They could not recal the dead. They could not blot out the misery of that horrible night upon which the loss of a pitiful sum of money had driven George Vane to the commission of the fatal act which had ended his life. No! His old friend could do nothing for him; his loving daughter could do nothing for him — except to avenge his death.

Carried away by her feelings; forgetful of her assumed character; forgetful of everything except that the hand now clasped in hers was the same that had been linked in that of her father, years and years ago, in the warm grasp of friendship; Eleanor Vane knelt down beside the old man's chair, and pressed his thin fingers to her lips.

CHAPTER XIX.

Like the Memory of a Dream.

Mrs. DARRELL drove away from Tolldale Priory late in the afternoon, and in a very despondent state of mind. She had done no good by her visit to Woodlands, and it seemed painfully probable that she had done a great deal of harm; for the unfortunate accident of a resemblance between Laura Mason's companion and the late George Vane had stirred up the memories of the past in that turbid stream, the old man's mind. The widow scarcely opened her lips during the homeward drive. She would fain have punished Eleanor for that unlucky chance by which she happened to resemble the dead man, and she did not fail to remark unpleasantly upon Miss Vane's conduct at Woodlands.

"One would really think you wished to trade upon your likeness to Mr. Vane, and to insinuate yourself into my uncle's good graces, Miss Vincent," the widow said, rather sharply.

Eleanor blushed crimson, but did not attempt to reply to her employer's bitter speech. The falsehood of an assumed name was perpetually placing her in positions against which her truthful nature revolted.

If Mrs. Darrell had been free to dismiss Eleanor Vane, she would doubtless have done so, for the girl's presence had now become a source of alarm to her. There were two reasons for this sentiment of alarm. First, the likeness which Maurice de Crespigny had discovered between Eleanor and his dead friend, and

which might prompt him at any moment to some capricious fancy for the girl; and, secondly, the fact that Eleanor's beauty and fascination might not be without their effect upon Launcelot Darrell.

The widow knew by cruel experience that her son was not a man to surrender his lightest caprice at the entreaty of another. At seven-and-twenty years of age he was as much a spoiled child as he had been at seven. Ellen Darrell looked back at the bitter trials of the past; and remembered how hard it had been to keep her son true even to his own interests. Selfish and self-willed, he had taken his own way; always relying upon his handsome face, his shallow versatility, his showy accomplishments, to carry him through every difficulty, and get him out of every dilemma; always eager for the enjoyment of the present hour, and reckless as to any penalties to be paid in the future.

Mrs. Darrell had concentrated every feeling of her heart into one passion: her love for this young man. Frigid and reserved to all the rest of the world, with him she was impulsive, vehement, spontaneous; ready to pour out her heart's blood at his feet, if he had needed such an evidence of her devotion. For him she was jealous and exacting; harsh to others; desperate and unforgiving to those whom she thought his enemies.

For Launcelot she was anxious and ambitious. The hope that her uncle Maurice would leave his fortune to the young man, whose boyish good looks and precocious talents had made some impression upon him, many years before, never entirely deserted her. But, even if that hope should fail, her sisters were elderly women like herself. If they succeeded in cajoling

Maurice de Crespigny out of his fortune, they must surely eventually leave it to their only nephew, Launcelot. This was how the widow reasoned. But there was another chance which she fancied she saw for her son's advancement. Laura Mason, the heiress, evidently admired the young man's handsome face and dashing manners. What more likely than that Launcelot might succeed in winning the hand and fortune of that capricious young lady?

Under these circumstances Mrs. Darrell would have been very glad to have removed Eleanor Vane out of her son's way; but this was not easily to be done. When the widow sounded Laura Mason upon the subject, and vaguely hinted at the necessity of parting with Eleanor, the heiress burst into a flood of tears, and declared passionately that she would not live without her darling Nelly. And when Mrs. Darrell went even further than this, and touched upon the subject in a conversation with Mr. Monckton, the lawyer replied very decidedly that he considered Miss Vincent's companionship of great benefit to his ward, and that he could not hear of any arrangement by which the two girls would be separated.

Mrs. Darrell, therefore, could do nothing but submit; in the hope that for once her son might consent to be governed by his interests, rather than by those erratic impulses which had led him in the reckless and riotous days of his early youth.

She pleaded with him; entreating him to be prudent and thoughtful for the future.

"You have suffered so much from poverty, Launcelot," she urged, "that surely you will lose no oppor-

tunity of improving your position. Look back, my boy; remember that bitter time in which you were lost to me, led away by low and vicious companions, and only appealing to me when you found yourself in debt and difficulty. Think of your Indian life, and the years you have wasted, — you who are so clever and accomplished, and who ought to have been so fortunate. Oh, Launcelot, if you knew what a bitter thing it is to a mother to see her idolised child waste every opportunity of winning the advancement which should be his by right, — yes, by right, Launcelot, by the right of your talents. I never reproached you, my boy, for coming home to me penniless. Were you to return to me twenty times, as you came back that night, you would always find the same welcome, the same affection. My love for you will never change, my darling, till I go to my grave. But I suffer very bitterly when I think of your wasted youth. You must be rich, Launcelot; you cannot afford to be poor. There are some men to whom poverty seems a spur that drives them on to greatness; but it has clogged your footsteps, and held you back from the fame you might have won.”

“Egad, so it has, mother,” the young man answered, bitterly; “a shabby coat paralyses a man’s arm, to my mind, and it’s not very easy for a fellow to hold his head very high when the nap’s all worn off his hat. But I don’t mean to sit down to a life of idleness, I can tell you, mother. I shall turn painter. You know I’ve got on with my painting pretty well during the last few years.”

“I’m glad of that, my dear boy. You had plenty of time to devote to your painting, then?”

"Plenty of time; oh, yes, I was pretty well off for that matter."

"Then you were not so hard worked in India?"

"Not always. That depended upon circumstances," the young man answered, indifferently. "Yes, mother, I shall turn painter, and try and make a fortune out of my brush."

Mrs. Darrell sighed. She wished to see her son made rich by a quicker road than the slow and toilsome pathway by which an artist reaches fortune.

"If you could make a wealthy marriage, Launcelot," she said, "you might afford to devote yourself to art, without having to endure the torturing anxieties which must be suffered by a man who has only his profession to depend upon. I wouldn't for the world wish you to sell yourself for money, for I know the wretchedness of a really mercenary marriage; but if —"

The young man flung back the dark hair from his forehead, and smiled at his mother as he interrupted her.

"If I should fall in love with this Miss Laura Mason, who, according to your account, is to have a power of money one of these days, I should prove myself a wise man. That's what you mean, isn't it, *madre mia*? Well, I'll do my best. The young lady is pretty, but her childishness is positively *impayable*. What's the amount of the fortune that is to counterbalance so much empty-headed frivolity? Eh, mother?"

"I can't quite answer that question, Launcelot. I only know that Mr. Monckton told me Laura will be very rich."

"And Gilbert Monckton, although a lawyer, is one of those uncompromising personages who never tell a lie. Well, mother, we'll see about it; I can't say anything more than that."

The young man had been standing before his easel with his palette and brushes in his hand during this conversation, now and then adding a touch here and there to a picture that he had been working at since his return. He had taken up his abode in his old apartments. His mother spent a good deal of her time with him; sitting at needlework by the open window, while he painted; listening while, in his idler moments, he sat at the piano, composing a few bars of a waltz, or trying to recall the words of some song that he had written long ago; always following him with watchful and admiring eyes, shadowed only by the mother's anxiety for her son's future.

Launcelot Darrell did not seem to be altogether a bad young man. He accepted his mother's love with something of that indolent selfishness common to those spoiled children of fortune upon whom an extra share of maternal devotion has been lavished. He absorbed the widow's affection; and gave her in return an easy-going, graceful attention, which satisfied the unselfish woman, and demanded neither trouble nor sacrifice from the young man himself.

"Now, if the wealthy heiress were the poor companion, mother," Mr. Darrell said, presently, working away with his brush as he spoke, "your scheme would be charming. Eleanor Vincent is a glorious girl; a little bit of a spitfire, I should think, quiet and gentle as she is with us; but a splendid girl; just the sort of wife for an indolent man; a wife who would rouse him out of his lethargy and drive him on to distinction."

Yes, Launcelot Darrell, who had never in his life resisted any temptation, or accepted any guidance except that of his own wishes, was led by them now;

and, instead of devoting himself to the young heiress, chose to fall desperately in love with her fair-haired companion. He fell in love with Eleanor Vane; desperately, after his own fashion. I doubt if there was any great intensity in the young man's desperation; for I do not believe that he was capable of any real depth of feeling. There was a kind of hollow, tinselly fervour in his nature which took the place of true passion. It may be that with him all emotions — love and remorse, penitence, pity, regret, hate, anger and revenge — were true and real so long as they lasted. But all these sentiments were so short-lived, by reason of the fickleness of his mind, that it was almost difficult to believe even in their temporary truth.

But Eleanor Vane, being very young and inexperienced, had no power of analysing the character of her lover. She only knew that he was handsome, accomplished, and clever; that he loved her, and that it was very agreeable to be loved by him.

I do not believe that she returned the young man's affection. She was like a child upon the threshold of a new world: bewildered and dazzled by the glorious aspect of the unknown region before her; beguiled and delighted by its beauty and novelty. All the darker aspects of the great passion were unknown to her, and undreamed of by her. She only knew that on the cheerless horizon that had so long bounded her life, a new star had arisen — a bright and wonderful planet, which for a while displaced the lurid light that had so long shone steadfastly across the darkness.

Eleanor Vane yielded herself up to the brief holiday-time which generally comes once in almost every woman's life, however desolate and joyless the rest of

that life may be. The holiday comes, — a fleeting summer of gladness and rejoicing. The earth lights up under a new sun and moon; the flowers bloom into new colours and scatter new perfumes on the sublimated atmosphere; the waters of the commonest rivers change to melted sapphires, and blaze with the splendour of a million jewels in the sunshine. The dull universe changes to fairy-land; but, alas! the holiday-time is very short: the children grow tired of paradise, or are summoned back to school; the sun and moon collapse into common-place luminaries; the flowers fade into every-day blossoms; the river flows a gray stream under a November sky; and the dream is over.

Launcelot Darrell had been little more than a fortnight in his mother's house when he declared his love for Miss Mason's companion. The young people had been a great deal together in that fortnight; wandering in the grassy lanes about Hazlewood, and in the shadowy woods round Tolldale Priory, or on breezy hills high up above the lawyer's sheltered mansion. In hope of an alliance between Launcelot and Gilbert Monckton's ward, Mrs. Darrell was obliged to submit to the necessity which threw her son very much into the society of the companion as well as of the heiress.

"He will surely never be so foolish as to thwart my plan for his future," thought the anxious mother. "Surely, surely, he will consent to be guided by his own interests. Gilbert Monckton must know that it is only likely an attachment may arise between Launcelot and Laura. He would not leave the girl with me unless he were resigned to such an event, and ready to give his consent to their marriage. My son is poor, certainly; but the lawyer knows that he has some hope of inheriting a great fortune."

While the mother pondered thus over her son's chances of advancement, the young man took life very easily; spending his mornings at his easel, but by no means over-exerting himself; and dawdling away his afternoons in rustic rambles with the two girls.

Laura Mason was very happy in the society of this new and brilliant companion. She was bewitched and fascinated by Mr. Darrell's careless talk; which sounded very witty, very profound, sarcastic, and eloquent in the ears of an ignorant girl. She admired him and fell in love with him, and wearied poor Eleanor with her very unreserved rhapsodies about the object of her affection.

"I know it's very bold and wicked and horrid to fall in love with anybody before they fall in love with one, you know, Eleanor," the young lady said in not very elegant English; "but he is so handsome and so clever. I don't think any one in the world could help loving him.

" 'I have no hope in loving thee,
I only ask to love;
I *ber-rood* upon my silent heart,
As on its nest a dove; ' "

added Miss Mason, quoting that favourite poet of all desponding lovers, poor L. E. L.

I think Mr. Monckton's ward rather enjoyed the hopelessness of her attachment. The brooding upon her silent heart was scarcely an accurate exposition of her conduct, as she talked reams of sentiment to Eleanor upon the subject of her unrequited affection. Miss Vane was patient and tender with her, listening to her foolish talk, and dreading the coming of that hour in which the childish young beauty must be rudely awakened from her rose-coloured dream.

"I don't want to marry him, you know, Eleanor," the young lady said; "I only want to be allowed to love him. You remember the German story in which the Knight watches the window of his lost love's convent cell. I could live for ever and ever near him; and be content to see him sometimes; or to hear his voice, even if I did not see him. I should like to wear boy's clothes, and be his page, like Viola, and tell him my own story, you know, some day."

Eleanor remembered her promise to Gilbert Monckton, and tried sometimes to check the torrent of sentimental talk.

"I know your love is very poetical, and I dare say it's very true, my pet," she said; "but do you think Mr. Darrell is quite worth all this waste of affection? I sometimes think, Laura dear, that we commit a sin when we waste our best feelings. Suppose by-and-by you should meet some one quite as worthy of your love as Launcelot Darrell; some one who would love you very devotedly; don't you think you would look back and regret having lavished your best and freshest feelings upon a person who —"

"Who doesn't care a straw for me," cried the heiress, half crying. "That's what you mean, Eleanor Vincent. You mean to insinuate that Launcelot doesn't care for me. You are a cruel, heartless girl, and you don't love me a bit."

And the young lady bemoaned her disappointment, and wept over the hardships of her lot; very much as she might have cried for any new plaything a few years before.

It was upon a burning August morning that Launcelot Darrell declared himself to Eleanor Vane. The

two girls had been sitting to him for a picture, — Eleanor as Rosalind, and Laura as Celia, — a pretty feminine group. Rosalind in her womanly robes, and not her forester's dress of grey and green; for the painter had chosen the scene in which Celia promises to share her cousin's exile.

This picture was to be exhibited in the Academy, and was to make Mr. Darrell's fortune. Laura had been called from the room to attend to some important business with a dressmaker from Windsor, and Eleanor and Launcelot were alone.

The young man went on painting for some time, and then, throwing down his brush with a gesture of impatience, went over to the window near which Eleanor sat, on a raised platform covered with a shabby drapery of red baize.

"Do you think the picture will be a success, Miss Vincent?" he asked.

"Oh yes, I think so, and hope so; but I am no judge, you know."

"Your judgment must be as good as the public judgment, I should think," Launcelot Darrell answered, rather impatiently. "The critics will try to write me down, I dare say, but I don't look to the critics to buy my picture. They'll call me crude and meretricious, and hard and cold, and thin and grey, I've no doubt; but the best picture, to my mind, is the picture that sells best, eh, Miss Vincent?"

Eleanor lifted her arched eyebrows with a look of surprise; this very low view of the question rather jarred upon her sense of the dignity of art.

"I suppose you think my sentiments very mercenary and contemptible, Miss Vincent," said the painter,

interpreting the expression of her face; "but I have lived out the romance of my life; or one part of that romance, at any rate; and have no very ardent aspiration after greatness in the abstract. I want to earn money. The need of money drives men into almost every folly; further, sometimes: into follies that touch upon the verge of crime."

The young man's face darkened suddenly as he spoke. He was silent for a few moments, not looking at his companion, but away out of the window into vacancy, as it seemed.

The memory of Gilbert Monckton's words flashed back upon Eleanor's mind. "There is a secret in Launcelot Darrell's life," the lawyer had said; "a secret connected with his Indian experience." Was he thinking of that secret now, Eleanor wondered. But the painter's face brightened almost as suddenly as it had been overshadowed. He flung back his head with an impetuous gesture. It seemed almost as if he had cast some imaginary burden from off his shoulders by that sudden movement.

"I want to earn money, Miss Vincent," he said. "Art in the abstract is very grand, no doubt. I quite believe in the man who stabbed his model in order to get the death agony for his picture of the Crucifixion; but I must make art subservient to my own necessities. I must earn money for myself and my wife, Eleanor. I might marry a rich woman, perhaps, but I want to marry a poor one. Do you think the girl I love will listen to me, Eleanor? Do you think she will accept the doubtful future I can offer her? Do you think she will be brave enough to share the fortunes of a struggling man?"

Nothing could be more heroic than the tone in which Launcelot Darrell spoke. He had the air of a man who means to strive, with the sturdy devotion of a martyr, to win the end of his ambition, rather than that of a sanguine but vacillating young gentleman who would be ready to fling himself down under the influence of the first moment of despondency, and live upon the proceeds of the pawning of his watch, while his unfinished picture rotted upon the canvas.

He had something of George Vane's nature, perhaps; that fatally hopeful temperament common to men who are for ever going to do great things, and for ever failing to achieve even the smallest. He was one of those men who are perpetually deluding other people by the force of their power of self-delusion.

Self-deluded and mistaken now, it was scarcely strange if he deceived Eleanor Vane, who was carried away by the impetuous torrent of words in which he told her that he loved her, and that the future happiness of his life depended upon the fiat which must issue from her lips.

Only very faltering accents came from those tremulous lips. Miss Vane was not in love; she was only bewildered, and perhaps a little bewitched, by the painter's vehemence. He was the first young, elegant, handsome, and accomplished man with whom she had ever been thrown much in contact. It is scarcely wonderful then, if this inexperienced girl of eighteen was a little influenced by the ardour of his admiration — by the eloquence of his wild talk.

She had risen from her seat in her agitation, and stood with her back to the sunlit window, trembling and blushing before her lover.

Launcelot Darrell was not slow to draw a flattering inference from these signs of womanly confusion.

"You love me, Eleanor," he said; "yes, you love me. You think, perhaps, my mother would oppose our marriage. You don't know me, dearest, if you can believe I would suffer any opposition to come between me and my love. I am ready to make any sacrifice for your sake, Eleanor. Only tell me that you love me, and I shall have a new purpose in life; a new motive for exertion."

Mr. Darrell held the girl's two hands clasped in both his own, as he pleaded thus, using hackneyed phrases with a vehement earnestness that gave new life to the old words. His face was close to Eleanor's, with the broad light of the sunny summer sky full upon it. Some sudden fancy — some vague idea, dim and indistinct as the faint memory of a dream whose details we strive vainly to recall — flashed into the mind of George Vane's orphan daughter as she looked into her lover's black eyes. She recoiled from him a little; her eyebrows contracted into a slight frown; her blushes faded out with the effort which she made to seize upon and analyse that sudden fancy. But her effort was vain: transient as a gleam of summer lightning the thought had flashed across her brain, only to melt utterly away.

While she was still trying to recall that lost idea, while Launcelot Darrell was still pleading for an answer to his suit, the door of the painting-room was pushed open — it had been left ajar by volatile Miss Mason, most likely — and the widow entered, pale, stern, and sorrowful-looking.

CHAPTER XX.

Recognition.

"I THOUGHT Laura was with you," Mrs. Darrell said, rather sharply, as she scrutinised Eleanor's face with no very friendly eyes.

"She was with us until a few minutes ago," Launcelot answered, carelessly; "but she was called away to see a milliner or a dressmaker, or some such important personage in the feminine decorative art line. I don't believe that young lady's soul ever soars above laces and ribbons, and all those miscellaneous fripperies which women dignify by the generic title of their 'things'!"

Mrs. Darrell frowned at her son's contemptuous allusion to the heiress.

"Laura Mason is a very amiable and accomplished girl," she said.

The young man shrugged his shoulders, and took up his palette and brushes.

"Will you settle yourself once more in the Rosalind attitude, Miss Vincent," he said. "I suppose our volatile Celia will be back presently."

"Will you go and look for her, Launcelot?" interposed Mrs. Darrell; "I want to speak to Miss Vincent."

Launcelot Darrell flung down his brushes and turned suddenly towards his mother with a look of angry defiance in his face.

"What have you to say to Miss Vincent that you can't say before me?" he asked. "What do you

mean, mother, by breaking in upon us like this, and scowling at us as if we were a couple of conspirators?"

Mrs. Darrell drew herself to her fullest height, and looked half sternly, half contemptuously at her son. His nature, in every quality weaker and meaner than her own, prompted him to shrink from any open contest with her. Dearly as she loved this selfish, handsome scapegrace, there were times in which her better sense revolted against the weakness of her affection; and at such times Launcelot Darrell was afraid of his mother.

"I have a great deal to say to Miss Vincent," the widow answered, gravely. "If you refuse to leave us together, I have no doubt Miss Vincent will have the good taste to come elsewhere with me."

Eleanor looked up, startled by the suppressed passion in the widow's tone.

"I will come with you anywhere, Mrs. Darrell," she said, "if you wish to speak to me."

"Come this way, then."

Mrs. Darrell swept out of the room, and Eleanor followed her, before the young man had any opportunity for remonstrance. The widow led the way to the pretty chamber in which Miss Vane slept, and the two women went in together, Mrs. Darrell shutting the door behind her.

"Miss Vincent," she said, taking Eleanor's hand in her own, "I am going to appeal to you more frankly than one woman often appeals to another. I might diplomatise and plot against you, but I am not base enough for that; though, I dare say, I could stoop to a good deal that is despicable for the sake of my son,

And, again, I have so good an opinion of you that I think candour will be the wiser policy. My son has asked you to be his wife."

"Madam," stammered Eleanor, looking aghast at the pale face, which had an almost tragic aspect in its earnestness.

"Yes, I told you just now that I could do despicable things for my son's sake. I was passing the door while Launcelot was talking to you. The door was ajar, you know. I heard a few words; enough to tell me the subject upon which he was speaking; and I stopped to hear more. I listened, Miss Vincent. It was very contemptible, was it not?"

Eleanor was silent. She stood before the widow looking down upon the ground. The colour came and went in her face; she was agitated and confused by what had happened; but in all her agitation and confusion the memory of that sudden fancy that had flashed across her brain while Launcelot Darrell talked to her was uppermost in her mind.

"You despise me for my conduct, Miss Vincent," said Mrs. Darrell, reading the meaning of the girl's silence; "but the day may come in which you may experience a mother's anguish; the brooding care, the unceasing watchfulness, the feverish, all-devouring anxiety which only a mother can feel. If that day ever comes, you will be able to forgive me; to think mercifully of me. I do not complain of my son; I never have complained of him. But I suffer; I suffer. I see him holding no place in the world, despised by prosperous and successful men, with a wasted youth behind him and a blank future before. I love him; but I am not deceived in him. The day for all deception is

past. He will never be rich or prosperous by any act of his own. There are but two chances for him: the chance of inheriting my uncle's fortune, or the chance of marrying a rich woman. I speak very frankly, you see, Miss Vincent, and I expect equal candour from you. Do you love my son?"

"Madam — Mrs. Darrell — I —"

"You would not answer him just now; I ask you to answer me. The prosperity of his future life hangs upon your reply. I know that he *might* marry a girl who does love him; and who can bring him a fortune which will place him in the position he ought to occupy. Be generous, Miss Vincent. I ask you to tell me the truth. That is the least you can do. Do you love my son, Launcelot Darrell? Do you love him with your whole heart and soul, as I love him?"

Eleanor lifted her head suddenly, and looked full in the widow's face.

"No, madam," she answered, proudly, "I do not."

"Thank God for that! Even if you had loved him, I would not have shrunk from asking you to sacrifice yourself for his happiness. As it is, I appeal to you without hesitation. Will you leave this place; will you leave me my son, with the chance of planning his future after my own fashion?"

"I will, Mrs. Darrell," Eleanor said, earnestly. "I thought, perhaps, till to-day — I may have fancied that I — I mean that I was flattered by your son's attention, and perhaps believed I loved him a little," the girl murmured shyly; "but I know now that I have been mistaken. Perhaps it is the truth and intensity of your love that shows me the shallowness and false-

hood of my own. I remember how I loved my father," — her eyes filled with tears as she spoke, — "and, looking back at my feelings for him, I know that I do not love Mr. Darrell. It will be much better for me to go away. I shall be sorry to leave Laura; sorry to leave Hazlewood, for I have been very happy here — too happy, perhaps. I will write to your son, and tell him that I leave this place of my own free will."

"Thank you, my dear," the widow said, warmly; "my son would be very hard with me if he thought that my influence had been the means of thwarting any whim of his. I know him well enough to know that this sentiment, like every other sentiment of his, will not endure for ever. He will be angry and offended, and wounded by your departure; but he will not break his heart, Miss Vincent."

"Let me go away at once, Mrs. Darrell," said Eleanor; "it will be better for me to go at once. I can return to my friends in London. I have saved some money while I have been with you, and I shall not go back to them penniless."

"You are a generous and noble-hearted girl. It shall be my care to provide you with at least as good a home as you have had here. I am not selfish enough to forget how much I have asked of you."

"And you will let me go at once. I would rather not see Laura, or say good-bye to her. We have grown so fond of each other. I never had a sister — at least never an affectionate sister — and Laura has been like one to me. Let me go away quietly without seeing her, Mrs. Darrell. I can write to her from London to say good-bye."

"You shall do just as you like, my dear," the widow answered. "I will drive you over to Windsor in time for the four o'clock train, and you will get into town before dark. I must go now and see what my son is doing. If he should suspect —"

"He shall suspect nothing till I am gone," said Eleanor. "It is past one o'clock now, Mrs. Darrell, and I must pack all my things. Will you keep Laura out of my room, for if she came here, she'd guess —"

"Yes, yes, I'll go and see — I'll make all arrangements."

Mrs. Darrell hurried out of the room, leaving Eleanor to contemplate the sudden change in her position. The girl dragged one of her trunks out of a recess in the simply-furnished bedchamber, and, sitting down upon it in a half-despondent attitude, reflected on the unlooked for break in her existence. Once more she was called upon to disunite herself from the past, and begin life anew.

"Am I never to know any rest?" she thought. "I had grown so accustomed to this place. I shall be glad to see the Signora and Richard once more; but Laura, Mr. Monckton, — I wonder whether they will be sorry to lose me."

By three o'clock in the afternoon, all Eleanor's preparations were completed. Her trunks packed, and handed over to the factotum of the Hazlewood establishment, who was to see them safely despatched by luggage train after the young lady's departure. At three o'clock precisely Miss Vincent took her seat beside Mrs. Darrell in the low basket carriage.

Circumstances had conspired to favour the girl's unnoticed departure from Hazlewood. Laura Mason had been prostrated by the intense strain upon her faculties caused by an hour's interview with her dress-maker; and had flung herself upon the sofa in the drawing-room, after sopping up half a pint of eau-de-Cologne on her flimsy handkerchief. Worn out by her exertions, and lulled by the summer heat, the young lady had fallen into a heavy slumber of two or three hours' duration.

Launcelot Darrell had left the house almost immediately after the scene in the painting-room, striding out of the hall without leaving any intimation as to the direction in which he was going, or the probable hour of his return.

Thus it was that the little pony-carriage drove quietly away from the gates of Hazlewood; and Eleanor left the house in which she had lived for upwards of a year, without any one caring to question her as to the cause of her departure.

Very few words were said by either Mrs. Darrell or her companion during the drive to Windsor. Eleanor was absorbed in gloomy thought. She did not feel any intense grief at leaving Hazlewood; but some sense of desolation, some despondency at the thought that she was a wanderer on the face of the earth, with no real claim upon any one, no actual right to rest anywhere. They drove into Windsor while she was thinking thus. They had come through the park, and they entered the town by the gateway at the bottom of the hill. They had driven up the hill and were in the principal street below the castle wall, when Mrs. Darrell uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Launcelot!" she said, "and we must pass him to get to the station. There's no help for it."

Eleanor looked up. Yes, before the door of one of the principal hotels stood Mr. Launcelot Darrell, with two other young men. One of these men was talking to him, but he was paying very little attention. He stood upon the edge of the curbstone, with his back half turned to his companion, kicking the pebbles on the road with the toe of his boot, and staring moodily before him.

In that one moment, — in the moment in which the pony-carriage, going at full speed, passed the young man, — the thought which had flashed, so vague and indistinct, so transient and intangible, through the mind of Eleanor Vane that morning, took a new shape, and arose palpable and vivid in her brain.

This man, Launcelot Darrell, was the sulky stranger, who had stood on the Parisian Boulevard, kicking the straws upon the curbstone, and waiting to entrap her father to his ruin.

CHAPTER XXI.

On the Track.

THE little pony-carriage drove on to the station; and Eleanor, like some traveller in a dream, saw the castle walls and turrets, the busy street and hurrying people spin past her eyes, and melt into confusion. She did not know how she entered the railway station, or how she came to be walking quietly up and down the platform with Mrs. Darrell. There was a choking sensation in her dry throat, a blinding mist before her eyes, and a confusion that was almost terrible to bear in her brain. She wanted to get away; anywhere, so long as it was away from all the world. In the meantime, she walked up and down the platform, with Launcelot Darrell's mother by her side.

"I am mad," she thought. "I am mad. It *cannot* be so!"

Again and again in the course of Eleanor Vane's brief association with the widow's son, something, some fancy, some shadowy recollection, vague and impalpable as the faintest clouds in the summer sky above Hazlewood, had flitted across her mind; only to be blotted away before she could even try to define or understand it. But now these passing fancies all culminated in one conviction; Launcelot Darrell was the man whom she had seen lounging on the curbstone of the Boulevard on the night of her last parting with her father.

In vain she reasoned with herself that she had no justifiable grounds for this conviction — the conviction

remained, nevertheless. The only foundation for her belief that Launcelot Darrell, from amongst all other men, was the one man whom she sought to pursue, was a resemblance in his attitude as he stood lounging in the Windsor street, to the attitude of the young man on the Boulevard. Surely this was the slightest, the weakest foundation on which belief ever rested. Eleanor Vane could acknowledge this; but she could not lessen the force of that belief. At the very moment when the memory of her father, and her father's death, had been furthest from her thoughts, this sudden conviction, rapid and forcible as inspiration, had flashed upon her.

The matter was beyond reason, beyond argument.

The young man loitering listlessly upon the curbstone of the Windsor street, was the man who had loitered on the Boulevard; waiting, sulkily enough, while his companion tempted George Vane to his destruction.

It seemed as if the girl's memory, suddenly endowed with a new and subtle power, took her back to that August night in the year '53, and placed her once more face to face with her father's enemy. Once more the dark, restless eyes, the pale, cowering face, and moustachioed lip, overshadowed by the slouched hat, flashed upon her for a moment, before the sulky stranger turned away to keep moody silence throughout his companion's babble. And with that memory of the past, was interlinked the face and figure of Launcelot Darrell; so closely, that do what she would, Eleanor Vane could not disassociate the two images.

And she had suffered this man, of all other men, to tell her that he loved her; she had taken a romantic pleasure in his devotion; day after day, and hour after

hour, she had been his companion; sharing his enjoyments, sympathising with his pursuits, admiring and believing him. This day — this very day — he had held her hand, he had looked in her face; and the words she had spoken to Richard Thornton had proved only a vain boast after all. No instinct in her own breast had revealed to her the presence of her father's murderer.

Mrs. Darrell looked furtively every now and then at the girl's face. The iron rigidity of that white face almost startled the widow. Was it the expression of terrible grief restrained by a superhuman effort of will?

"Does this girl love my son, I wonder?" the widow thought; and then the answer, prompted by a mother's pride, came quickly after the question. "Yes, how could she do otherwise than love him? How could any woman on earth be indifferent to my boy?"

Something, almost akin to pity, stirred faintly in the heart which was so cold to every creature upon earth, except this spoiled and prodigal son; and Mrs. Darrell did her best to comfort the banished girl.

"I am afraid you are ill, my dear Miss Vincent," the widow said. "The excitement of this sudden departure has been too much for you. Pray, my dear, do not think that I submit to this necessity without very great regret. You have given me perfect satisfaction in everything you have done, ever since you entered my house. No praises I can bestow upon you in recommending you to a new home will go beyond the truth. Forgive me! Forgive me, my poor child; I know I must seem very cruel; but I love my son so dearly — I love him so dearly."

There was real feeling in the tone in which these words were spoken; but the widow's voice sounded far away to Eleanor Vane, and the words had no meaning. The girl turned her stony face towards the speaker, and made a feeble effort to understand what was said to her; but all power of comprehension seemed lost in the confusion of her brain.

"I want to get back to London," she said. "I want to get away from this place. Will it be long before the train starts, Mrs. Darrell?"

"Not five minutes. I have put up your money in this envelope, my dear, a quarter's salary; the quarter began in June, you know, and I have paid you up to September. I have paid for your ticket, also, in order that your money might not be broken into by that expense. Your luggage will be sent to you to-morrow. You will get a cab at the station, my dear. Your friends will be very much surprised to see you, no doubt."

"My friends!" repeated Eleanor, in an absent tone.

"Yes, the good music-mistress and her son. I have your address, Miss Vincent, and you may rely on hearing from me in a few days. I shall take care that you suffer no inconvenience from this sudden change in all our plans. Good-bye, and God bless you, my dear!"

Eleanor had taken her seat in the carriage by this time, and the train was about to move. Mrs. Darrell held out her hand; but the girl drew away from her with a sudden movement of terror. "Oh, please do not shake hands with me!" she cried. "I am very, very unhappy."

The train moved away before the widow could reply to this strange speech; and the last thing that Eleanor saw, was the pale face of Launcelot Darrell's mother turned towards her with a look of surprise.

"Poor child," thought Mrs. Darrell, as she walked slowly back to the station door, before which her pony-carriage waited. "She feels this very much, but she has acted nobly."

The widow sighed as she remembered that the worst part of the struggle was yet to come. She would have her son's indignation to encounter and to endure; not the stormy passion of a strong man, unfairly separated from the woman he loves; but the fretful irritation of a spoiled child who has been robbed of a favourite toy.

It was nearly dark when Eleanor Vane reached the Pilasters. She paid and dismissed the cab in Dudley Street, and made her way on foot under the familiar archway, and into the Colonnade, where the same children seemed to be playing the same games in the dusky light, the same horses peering from the stable doors, the same cabmen drinking at the old-fashioned public house at the corner.

The Signora was giving a singing-lesson to a stolid young person with a fat face and freckles, who was being prepared for the lyric drama, and wished to appear at one of the opera houses as Norma, after a dozen lessons or so. Eliza Piccirillo was trying her hardest to simplify a difficult passage for this embryo Grisi's comprehension, when Eleanor Vane opened the door of the little sitting-room, and appeared upon the threshold.

It would have been natural to the girl to have rushed to the piano and flung herself into the arms of the Signora at the risk of upsetting the stolid pupil; and there was something so very *unnatural* in her manner as she paused in the open doorway, — something so wan and ghost-like in her appearance, that Eliza Piccirillo rose from her music-stool in alarm; and stared aghast at this unexpected visitor.

"Eleanor!" she exclaimed, "Eleanor!",

"Yes, dear Signora, it is I! I — I know I have come back very unexpectedly; I have a great deal to tell you by-and-by. But I am tired to death. May I sit down, please, while you finish your lesson?"

"*May* you sit down! My darling Nelly, is that the way you talk in your old home. My dear, dear child, do you think you can ever come so unexpectedly as to fail to find a welcome from Eliza Piccirillo. Here, my dear; sit down and make yourself as comfortable as you can until I'm able to attend to you. Excuse me, Miss Dodson, we'll go on with the duet directly."

The music-mistress wheeled forward an old easy-chair, her own favourite seat, and Eleanor dropped wearily into it. Signora Piccirillo removed the girl's bonnet, and tenderly smoothed her tumbled hair; murmuring expressions of welcome and affection, and whispering a promise that the lesson should be very soon finished.

She went back to Norma after seeing Eleanor comfortably ensconced in the arm-chair, and hammered away sturdily and conscientiously at the "*Deh, Conte*" duet; in which Miss Dodson gave a very mild interpretation of the Italian composer's meaning, and sang

about Pollio, her children, and her wrongs as placidly as if she had been declaiming her wish to be a butterfly, or a daisy, or any other sentiment common to English ballad-singers.

But when Miss Dodson had finished singing, and had put on her bonnet and shawl, which operation occupied a good deal of unnecessary time, and had rolled up her music, and found her gloves, which had fallen off the piano and hidden themselves in an obscure and dusty corner of the room, and had further entered into a detailed and intricate explanation of her engagements and domestic circumstances, before making an appointment for the next lesson, and had been finally hustled out of the room and lighted down the stairs, and fully instructed as to the nearest way from the Pilasters to Camden Town, Eliza Piccirillo was able to give her full attention to the pale-faced girl who had returned so suddenly to her old shelter. The music-mistress was almost frightened at the expression of Eleanor Vane's face. She remembered only too well having seen that look before, upon the September night in Paris; when the girl of fifteen had sworn to be revenged upon her father's enemies.

"Nelly, my darling," she said, seating herself beside Eleanor's chair, "how is it that you come home so suddenly? Nothing could be greater happiness than to have you back, my dear. But I know that something has happened; I can see it in your face, Nelly. Tell me, my love, what is it?"

"It is nothing to be sorry about, dear Signora; I have come away because — because Mrs. Darrell wished it. Her son — her only son has come home

from India, and she wants him to marry a rich woman, and — and —”

“And he has fallen in love with *you*, eh, Nelly?” asked the Signora. “Well, I’m not surprised to hear that, my dear, and you are honourable enough to beat a retreat, and leave the young man free to make a mercenary marriage at his mother’s bidding. Dear, dear, what strange things people are ready to do for money now-a-days. I’m sure you’ve acted very wisely, my darling; so cheer up, and let me see the bright smile that we’ve been accustomed to. There’s nothing in all this to make you look so pale, Nelly.”

“Do I look pale?”

“Yes, as pale as a ghost weary with a long night’s wandering. Nelly, dear,” said the Signora, very gently, “you weren’t in love with this young man; you didn’t return his affection, did you?”

“In love with him!” cried Eleanor Vane, with a shudder, “oh! no, no.”

“And yet you seem sorry at having left Hazlewood.”

“I am sorry — I — I had many reasons for wishing to stay there.”

“You were attached to your companion, Miss Mason?”

“Yes, I was very much attached to her,” answered Eleanor; “don’t ask me any more questions to-night, dear Signora. I’m tired out with my journey and the excitement of — all — that has happened to-day. I will explain things more fully to-morrow; I am glad to come back to you — very, very glad to see you once more, dearest friend; but I had a strong reason for

wishing to stay at Hazlewood, — I have a powerful motive for wanting to go back there, if I could go back — which I fear I never can." The girl stopped abruptly, as if absorbed in her own thoughts, and almost unconscious of her friend's presence.

"Well, well, Nelly, I won't question you any further," Eliza Piccirillo said, soothingly. "Goodness knows, my dear, I am glad enough to have you with me, without worrying you about the why and the wherefore. But I must go and try and get your little room ready again for you, or perhaps, as it's late, you'd better sleep with me to-night."

"If you please, dear Signora."

The music-mistress hurried away to make some preparations in the bed-chamber adjoining the little sitting-room; and Eleanor Vane sat staring at the guttering tallow candles on the table before her, lost in the tumult and confusion of thoughts which as yet took no distinct form in her brain.

At the very moment in which she had set a barrier between herself and Hazlewood, that might prevent her ever crossing the threshold of its gates, she had made a discovery which rendered that retired country dwelling-house the one spot upon earth to which she had need to have free access.

"I fancied that I was going away from my revenge when I left London to go into Berkshire," she thought, "now I leave my revenge behind me at Hazlewood. And yet how can it be as I think? How can it be so? Launcelot Darrell went to India a year before my father died. Can it be only a likeness after all — an accidental likeness between *that man* and Mrs. Darrell's son?"

She sat thinking of these things — reasoning with herself upon the utter improbability of the identity of the two men, yet yielding again and again to that conviction which had forced itself upon her, sudden and irresistible, in the Windsor street, — while the Signora bustled about between the two rooms, stopping to cast a stolen glance now and then at Eleanor Vane's thoughtful face.

Mr. Richard Thornton came in by-and-by. The Phoenix was closed as to dramatic performances, but the scene-painter's work never stopped. The young man gave utterance to a cry of delight as he saw the figure sitting in his aunt's easy-chair.

"Nell!" he exclaimed, "has the world come to an end, and have you dropped into your proper position in the general smash! Eleanor! how glad I am to see you."

He held out both his hands. Miss Vane rose and mechanically put her white fingers in the weather-beaten looking palms held out to receive them.

In that moment the scene-painter saw that something had happened.

"What's the matter, Nell?" he cried eagerly.

"Hush, Dick," said the girl, in a whisper. "I don't want the Signora to know."

"You don't want the Signora to know what?"

"I have found that man."

"What man?"

"The man who caused my father's death."

CHAPTER XXII.

In the Shipbroker's Office.

ELEANOR VANE employed the morning after her arrival at the Pilasters in writing to Laura Mason. She would have written a long letter if she could, for she knew what grief her sudden departure must have caused her childish and confiding companion; but she could not write of anything except the one thought that absorbed her whole brain, leaving her for the common business of life a purposeless and powerless creature. The explanation which she gave of her sudden departure was lame and laboured; her expressions of regard were trite and meaningless. It was only when she came to that subject which was the real purpose of her letter; it was only when she came to write of Launcelot Darrell, that there was any vigour or reality in her words."

"I have a favour to ask you, dear Laura," she wrote, "and I must beg you to use your best discretion in granting it. I want you to find out for me the date of Mr. Darrell's departure for Calcutta, and the name of the vessel in which he sailed. Do this, Laura, and you will be serving me; perhaps serving him also."

"If I find that he really was in India at the date of my father's death," Eleanor thought, "I *must* cease to suspect him."

Later in the day, Miss Vane went out with Richard into the streets and squares in which all their secret conferences had taken place. She told the scene-painter

very simply and briefly of what had happened, and poor Dick listened to her story with a tender respect, as he would have listened to anything from her. But he shook his head with a sad smile when she had finished.

"What do you think now, Richard?" she asked.

"I think that you are the dupe of a foolish fancy, Nelly," the young man answered. "You are deceived by some chance resemblance between this Mr. Darrell and the man you saw upon the Boulevard. Any dark pale-faced man lounging moodily on a curbstone would have reminded you of the figure which is so interwoven with the memories of that mournful time in Paris. Forget it, Nelly, my dear; forget that dark chapter in the history of your girlhood. Your father's rest will be none the sweeter because the brightness of your youth is blighted by these bitter memories. Do your duty, Eleanor, in the state to which you are called. You are *not* called upon to sacrifice the fairest years of your life to a Quixotic scheme of vengeance."

"Quixotic!" cried Eleanor, reproachfully; "you would not speak like this, Richard, if *your* father had suffered as my father suffered through the villany of a gambler and cheat. It is no use talking to me, Dick," she added, resolutely. "If this conviction, which I cannot get out of my mind, is a false one, its falsehood must be proved. If it is true — Why then it will seem to me as if Providence had flung this man across my pathway; and that I am appointed to bring punishment upon him for his wickedness."

"Perhaps, Eleanor; but this Mr. Darrell is *not* the man."

"How do you know he is not?"

"Because, according to your own account, Launcelot was in India in the year '53."

"Yes, they *say* that he was there."

"Have you any reason to doubt the fact?" asked Richard.

"Yes," answered Eleanor, "when Mr. Darrell first returned to Hazlewood, Laura Mason was very anxious to hear all about what she called his 'adventures' in India. She asked him a great many questions, and I remember — I cannot tell you, Dick, how carelessly I listened at the time, though every word comes back to me now as vividly as if I had been a prisoner on trial for my life, listening breathlessly to the evidence of the witnesses against me — I remember now how obstinately Launcelot Darrell avoided all Laura's questions, telling her at last, almost rudely, to change the subject. The next day Mr. Monckton came to us, and he talked about India, and Mr. Darrell again avoided the question in the same sullen, disagreeable manner. You may think me weak and foolish, Richard, and I dare say I am so; but Mr. Monckton is a very clever man. *He* could not be easily deceived."

"But what of him?"

"He said, 'Launcelot Darrell has a secret; and that secret is connected with his Indian experiences.' I thought very little of this at the time, Dick; but I think I understand it now."

"Indeed, and the young man's secret —?"

"Is that he never went to India."

"Eleanor!"

"Yes, Richard, I think and believe this; and you must help me to find out whether I am right or wrong."

The scene-painter sighed. He had hoped that his beautiful adopted sister had long since abandoned or forgotten her Utopian scheme of vengeance, in the congenial society of a gay-hearted girl of her own age. And, behold, here she was, vindictive, resolute, as upon that Sunday evening, a year and a half ago, on which they had walked together in those dingy London streets.

Eleanor Vane interpreted her companion's sigh.

"Remember your promise, Richard," she said. "You promised to serve me, and you must do so — you *will* do so, won't you, Dick?"

The avenging fury had transformed herself into a siren as she spoke, and looked archly up at her companion's face, with her head on one side, and a soft light in her grey eyes.

"You won't refuse to serve me, will you, Richard?"

"Refuse!" cried the young man. "Oh, Nelly, Nelly, you know very well there is nothing in the world I could refuse you."

Miss Vane accepted this assurance with great composure. She had never been able to disassociate Richard Thornton with those early days in which she had accompanied him to Covent Garden to buy mulberry leaves for his silkworms, and had learned to play "God save the Queen" upon the young musician's violin. Nothing was further from her thoughts than the idea that poor Dick's feelings could have undergone any change since those childish days in the King's Road, Chelsea.

The letter which Eleanor so feverishly awaited from Laura Mason came by return of post. The young lady's epistle was very long, and rather rambling in its na-

ture. Three sheets of notepaper were covered with Miss Mason's lamentations for her Eleanor's absence, reproachful complainings against her cruelty, and repeated entreaties that she would come back to Hazlewood.

George Vane's daughter did not linger over this feminine missive. A few days ago she would have been touched by Laura's innocent expressions of regard; now her eyes hurried along the lines, taking little note of all those simple words of affection and regret, and looking greedily forward to that one only passage in the letter which was likely to have any interest for her.

This passage did not occur until Eleanor had reached the very last of the twelve pages which Miss Mason had covered with flowing Italian characters, whose symmetry was here and there disfigured by sundry blots and erasures. But as her eyes rested upon the last page, Eleanor Vane's hand tightened upon the paper in her grasp, and the hot blood rushed ready to her earnest face.

"And I have found out all you want to know, dear Nell," wrote Miss Mason, "though I am puzzled out of my wits to know why you should want to know it—when I did exercises in composition at Bayswater, they wouldn't let me put two 'knows' so near together; but you won't mind it, will you, dear? Well, darling, I'm not very clever at beating about the bush or finding out anything in a diplomatic way; so this afternoon at tea — I am writing to catch the evening post, and Bob is going to take my letters to the village for sixpence — I asked Launcelot Darrell, who was not drinking his tea, like a Christian, but lolling in the

window, smoking a cigar: he has been as sulky as a bear ever since you left — oh, Nelly, Nelly, he isn't in love with you, is he? — I should break my heart if I thought he was — I asked him, point blank, what year and what day he sailed for India. I suppose the question sounded rather impertinent, for he coloured up scarlet all in a minute, and shrugged his shoulders in that dear disdainful way of his that always reminds me of Lara or the Corsair — L. and the C. were the same person, though, weren't they — and said, 'I don't keep a diary, Miss Mason, or I should be happy to afford you any information you may require as to my antecedents.' I thought I should have dropped through the floor, Nelly, — the floor won't let one drop through it, or else I am sure I should, — and I couldn't have asked another question, even for your sake, dear; when, strange to say, Mrs. Darrell got me quite out of the difficulty. 'I am sorry you should answer Laura so very unkindly, Launcelot,' she said; 'there is nothing strange in her question. I remember the date of your departure from your native country only too vividly. You left this house upon the 3rd of October, '52, and you were to sail from Gravesend on the 4th, in the Princess Alice. I have reason to remember the date, for it seemed as if my uncle chose the very worst season of the year for sending you upon a long sea voyage. But he was prompted, no doubt, by my sisters. I ought to feel no anger against *him*, poor old man.'

Eleanor Vane glanced hurriedly at the concluding words of the letter. Then, with the last sheet crumpled in her hand, she sat motionless and absorbed, thinking over its contents.

"If Launcelot Darrell sailed for India upon the 4th of October, '52, he is not likely to have been in Paris, in '53. If I can only prove to myself that he did sail upon that date, I will try and believe that I have been deluded by some foolish fancy of my own. But why did his face flush scarlet when Laura questioned him about his voyage — why did he pretend to have forgotten the date?"

Eleanor waited impatiently for the arrival of her friend and counsellor, Richard Thornton. He came in at about three o'clock in the afternoon, while his aunt was still absent amongst her out-of-door pupils, and flung himself, jaded and worn out, on the chintz-covered sofa. But tired as he was, he aroused himself by an effort to listen to that portion of Laura Mason's letter which related to Launcelot Darrell.

"What do you think now, Dick?" Miss Vane asked, when she had finished reading.

"Pretty much what I thought before, Nell," answered Mr. Thornton; "this young fellow's objection to talk of his Indian voyage is no proof that he never went upon that voyage. He may have half-a-dozen unpleasant recollections connected with that part of his life. I don't particularly care about talking of the Phoenix; but I never committed a murder in the obscurity of the flies, or buried the body of my victim between the stage and the mezzanine floor. People have their secrets, Nell, and we have no right to pry into the small mysteries which may lurk under a change of countenance or an impatient word."

Eleanor Vane took very little notice of the young man's argument.

"Can you find out if Launcelot Darrell sailed in the Princess Alice, Dick?" she added.

The scene-painter rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I can *try* and find out, my dear," he said, after a pause; "that's open to anybody. The Princess Alice! She's one of Ward's ships, I think. If the shipbrokers are inclined to be civil, they'll perhaps help me; but I have no justification for bothering them upon the subject, and they *may* tell me to go about my business. If I could give them a good reason for my making such an inquiry, I might very likely find them willing to help me. But what can I tell them; except that a very beautiful young person with grey eyes and auburn hair has taken an absurd crotchet into her obstinate head; and that I, her faithful slave, am compelled to do her bidding?"

"Never mind what they say to you, Richard," Miss Vane replied, authoritatively, "they *must* answer your question, if you only go on asking them long enough."

Mr. Thornton smiled.

"That's the true feminine method of obtaining information, isn't it, Nell?" he said; "however, I'll do my best, and if the shipbrokers are to be 'got at,' as sporting gentlemen say, it shall go hard if I don't get a list of the passengers who sailed in the Princess Alice."

"Dear, dear Dick!" cried Eleanor, holding out both her hands to her champion. The young man sighed. Alas, he knew only too well that all this pretty friendliness was as far away from any latent tenderness or hidden emotion as the blustering frozen North from the splendid sunny South.

"I wonder whether she knows what love is," thought

the scene-painter; "I wonder whether her heart has been touched ever so slightly by the fatal emotion. No; she is a bright virginal creature, all confidence and candour, and she has yet to learn the mysteries of life. I wish I could think less of her, and fall in love with Miss Montalembert — her name is plain Lambert, and she has added the Monta for the sake of euphony. I wish I could fall in love with Lizzie Lambert, popularly known as Elise Montalembert, the soubrette at the Phoenix. She is a good little girl, and earns a salary of four pounds a week. She's fond of the Signora, too, and we could leave the Pilasters and go into house-keeping upon our joint salaries."

Mr. Thornton's fancies might have rambled on in this wise for some time, but he was abruptly aroused from his reverie by Eleanor Vane, who had been watching him rather impatiently.

"When are you going to the shipbroker's, Dick?" she asked.

"When am I going?"

"Yes, you'll go at once, won't you?"

"Eh! Well, my dear Nell, Cornhill's a good step from here."

"But you can take a cab," cried the young lady. "I've plenty of money, Dick, and do you think I shall grudge it for such a purpose? Go at once, Richard, dear, and take a cab."

She pulled a purse from her pocket, and tried to force it into the young man's hand, but he shook his head.

"I'm afraid the shipbroker's office would be closed, Nelly," he said. "We'd better wait till to-morrow morning."

But the young lady would not hear of this. She was sure the shipbroker's office wouldn't close so early, she said, with as much authority as if she had been intimately acquainted with the habits of shipbrokers; and she hustled Dick down stairs and out of the house before he well knew where he was.

He returned in about an hour and a half; very tired and dusty; having preferred his independence and an omnibus to the cab offered by Eleanor.

"It's no use, Nelly," he said despondently, as he threw off his hat, and ran his dirty fingers through the rumpled shock of dusty brown hair that had been blown about his face by the hot August wind, "the office was just closing, and I couldn't get anything out of the clerks. I was never so cruelly snubbed in my life."

Miss Vane looked very much disappointed, and was silent for a minute or so. Then her face suddenly brightened, and she patted Richard's shoulder with a gesture expressive of patronage and encouragement.

"Never mind, Dick," she said smilingly, "you shall go again to-morrow morning early; and I'll go with you. We'll see if these shipbroker's clerks will snub *me*."

"Snub you!" cried Richard Thornton, in a rapture of admiration. "I think that, of all the members of the human family, paid officials are the most unpleasant and repulsive; but I don't think there's a clerk in Christendom who could snub you, Miss Vane."

Eleanor smiled. Perhaps for the first time in her life the young lady was guilty of a spice of that feminine sin called coquetry. Her boxes had arrived from Hazlewood upon the previous evening. She was

armed therefore with all those munitions of war without which a woman can scarcely commence a siege upon the fortress of man's indifference.

She rose early the next morning — for she was too much absorbed in the one great purpose of her life to be able to sleep very long or very soundly — and arrayed herself for a visit to the shipbroker.

She put on a bonnet of pale blue crape, which was to be the chief instrument in the siege — a feminine battering ram or Armstrong gun before which the stoutest wall must have crumbled — and smoothed her silken locks, her soft amber-dropping tresses, under this framework of diaphanous azure. Then she went into the little sitting-room where Mr. Richard Thornton was loitering over his breakfast, to try the effect of this piece of milliner's artillery upon the unhappy young man.

“Will the clerks snub me, Dick?” she asked archly.

The scene-painter replied with his mouth full of egg and bread-and-butter, and was more enthusiastic than intelligible.

A four-wheel cab jolted Miss Vane and her companion to Cornhill, and the young lady contrived to make her way into the sanctum sanctorum of the shipbroker himself, in a manner which took Richard Thornton's breath away from him, in the fervour of his admiration. Every barrier gave way before the blue bonnet and glistening auburn hair, the bright grey eyes and friendly smile. Poor Dick had approached the officials with that air of suppressed enmity and lurking hate with which the Englishman generally addresses his brother Englishman; but Eleanor's friend-

liness and familiarity disarmed the stoniest of the clerks, and she was conducted to the shipbroker's private room by an usher who bowed before her as if she had been a queen.

The young lady told her story very simply. She wished to ascertain if a gentleman called Launcelot Darrell had sailed in the Princess Alice on the 4th of October, '52.

This was all she said. Richard Thornton stood by, fingering difficult passages in his last overture on the brim of his hat, out of sheer perturbation of spirit, while he wondered at and admired Miss Vane's placid assurance.

"I shall be extremely obliged if you can give me this information," she said in conclusion, "for a great deal depends upon my being able to ascertain the truth in this matter."

The shipbroker looked through his spectacles at the earnest face turned so trustingly towards his own. He was an old man, with grand-daughters as tall as Eleanor, but was nevertheless not utterly dead to the influence of a beautiful face. The auburn hair and diaphanous bonnet made a bright spot of colour in the dinginess of his dusty office.

"I should be very ungallant were I to refuse to serve a young lady," the old man said politely. "Jarvis," he added, turning to the clerk who had conducted Eleanor to his apartment, "do you think you could contrive to look up the list of passengers in the Princess Alice, October 4, '52?"

Mr. Jarvis, who had told Richard to go about his business upon the day before, said he had no doubt he could, and went away to perform this errand.

Eleanor's breath grew short and quick, and her colour rose as she waited for the clerk's return. Richard executed impossible passages on the brim of his hat. The shipbroker watched the girl's face, and drew his own deductions from the flutter of agitation visible in that bright countenance.

"Aha!" he thought, "a love affair, no doubt. This pretty girl in the blue bonnet has come here to look after a runaway sweetheart."

The clerk returned, carrying a ledger, with his thumb between two of the leaves. He opened the uninteresting-looking volume, and laid it on the table before his employer, pointing with his spare forefinger to one particular entry.

"A berth was taken for a Mr. Launcelot Darrell, who was to share his cabin with a Mr. Thomas Halliday," the shipbroker said, looking at the passage to which the clerk pointed.

Eleanor's face crimsoned. She had wronged the widow's son then after all.

"But the name was crossed out afterwards," continued the old man, "and there's another entry further down, dated October 5th. The ship sailed without Mr. Darrell."

The crimson flush faded out of Eleanor's face and left it deadly pale. She tottered a few paces towards the table, with her hand stretched out, as if she would have taken the book from the shipbroker and examined the entry for herself. But midway between the chair she had left and the table, her strength failed her, and she would have fallen if Richard Thornton had not dashed his hat upon the ground, and caught her sinking figure in his outstretched arms.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the shipbroker, "bless my soul: a glass of water, Jarvis; this is very sad, very sad, indeed. A runaway lover, I suppose, or a brother, perhaps. These sort of things are always happening. I assure you, if I had the gift that some of you young people have, I could write half a dozen romances out of the history of this office."

The clerk came back with the glass of water; it was rather a mirky-looking fluid, but a few drops between Eleanor's pale lips served to bring the life back to her.

She lifted her head with the proud resolution of a queen, and looked at the compassionate shipbroker with a strange smile. She had heard the old man's suppositions about lovers and brothers. How far away his simple fancy led him from the bitter truth.

She held out her hand to him as she rose from her chair, erect and dauntless as a fair-haired Joan of Arc, ready to gird on the sword in defence of her King and country.

"I thank you very much, sir," she said, "for what you have done for me to-day. My father was an old man; as old or older perhaps than yourself; and he died a very cruel death. I believe that your kindness of this day will help me to avenge him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Resolved.

LAUNCELOT DARRELL had not sailed for Calcutta in the Princess Alice. This point once established, it was utterly vain for Richard Thornton to argue against that indomitable belief which had taken possession of Eleanor Vane's mind, respecting the identity between the man who had won her father's money at *écarté*, and Mrs. Darrell's only son.

"I tell you, Richard," she said, when the scene-painter argued with her, "that nothing but proof positive of Launcelot Darrell's absence in India at the date of my father's death would have dispossessed me of the idea that flashed upon me on the day I left Berkshire. He was not in India at that time. He deceived his mother and his friends. He remained in Europe; and led, no doubt, an idle, dissipated life. He must have lived by his wits, for he had no money from his mother; no one to help him — no profession to support him. What is more likely than that he went to Paris, — the paradise of scoundrels, I have heard you say, Richard, — under an assumed name? What more likely? Why, *he was there!* The man I saw on the Boulevard, and the man I saw in the Windsor street, are one and the same. You cannot argue me out of that conviction, Richard Thornton, for it is the truth. It is the truth, and it shall be the business of my life to prove that it is so."

"And what then, Eleanor?" Mr. Thornton asked

gravely. "Supposing you can prove this; by such evidences as will be very difficult to get at; by such an investigation as will waste your life, blight your girlhood, warp your nature, unsex your mind, and transform you from a candid and confiding woman into an amateur detective? Suppose you do all this, — and you little guess, my dear, the humiliating falsehoods, the pitiful deceptions, the studied basenesses, you must practise if you are to tread that sinuous pathway, — what then? What good is effected; what end is gained? Are you any nearer to the accomplishment of the vow you uttered in the Rue l'Archevêque?"

"What do you mean, Richard?"

"I mean that to prove this man's guilt is not to avenge your father's death. Neither you nor the law have any power to punish him. He may or may not have cheated your poor father. At this distance of time you can prove nothing; except that he played *écarté* in the private room of a café, and that he won all your father's money. He would only laugh in your face, my poor Nelly, if you were to bring such a charge as this against him."

"If I can once prove that, which I now believe as firmly as if every mortal proof had demonstrated its truth, I know how to punish Launcelot Darrell," replied the girl.

"You know how to punish him?"

"Yes. His uncle — that is to say, his great uncle — Maurice de Crespigny, was my father's firmest friend. I need not tell you that story, Dick, for you have heard it often enough from my poor father's own lips. Launcelot Darrell hopes to inherit the old man's money, and is, I believe, likely enough to do so. But if I

could prove to the old man that my father died a melancholy and untimely death through his nephew's treachery, Launcelot Darrell would never receive a sixpence of that money. I know how eagerly he looks forward to it, though he affects indifference."

"And you would do this, Eleanor?" asked Richard, staring aghast at his companion; "you would betray the secrets of this young man's youth to his uncle, and compass his ruin by that revelation?"

"I would do what I swore to do in the Rue l'Archevêque. I would avenge my father's death. The last words my poor father ever wrote appealed to me to do that. I have never forgotten those words. There may have been a deeper treachery in that night's work than you or I know of, Richard. Launcelot Darrell knew who my father was — he knew of the friendship between him and Mr. de Crespigny. How do we know that he did not try to goad the poor old man to that last act of his despair; how do we know that he did not plan those losses at cards, in order to remove his uncle's friend from his pathway? Oh, God! Richard, if I thought that ——!"

The girl rose from her chair in a sudden tumult of passion, with her hands clenched and her eyes flashing.

"If I could think that his treachery went beyond the baseness of cheating my father of his money for the money's sake, I would take *his* life for that dear life as freely and as unhesitatingly as I lift my hand up now."

She raised her clenched hand towards the ceiling as she spoke, as if to register some unuttered vow. Then, turning abruptly to the scene-painter, she said, almost imploringly:

"It can't be, Richard; he cannot have been so base as that. He held my hand in his only a few days ago. I would cut off that hand if I could think that Launcelot Darrell had planned my father's death."

"But you cannot think it, my dear Eleanor," Richard answered, earnestly. "How should the young man know that your father would take his loss so deeply to heart? We none of us calculate the consequences of our sins, my dear. If this man cheated, he cheated because he wanted money. For Heaven's sake, Nelly, leave him and his sin in the hands of Providence. The future is not a blank sheet of paper, for us to write any story we please upon; but a wonderful chart mapped out by a divine and unerring hand. Launcelot Darrell will not go unpunished, my dear. 'My faith is strong in Time,' as the poet says. Leave the young man to time — and to Providence."

Eleanor Vane shook her head, smiling bitterly at her friend's philosophy. Poor mad Constance's reply always rose, in some shape or other, to the girl's lips in answer to Richard's arguments. The Cardinal reasons with wonderful discretion, but the bereaved mother utters one sentence that is more powerful than all the worthy man's moralities:

"He talks to me, that never had a son!"

"It is no use preaching to me." Miss Vane said. "If *your* father had died by this man's treachery, you would not feel so charitably disposed towards him. I *will* keep the promise made three years ago. I *will* prove Launcelot Darrell's guilt; and that guilt shall stand between him and Maurice de Crespigny's fortune."

"You forget one point in this business, Eleanor."

"What point?"

"It may take you a very long time to obtain the proof you want. Mr. de Crespigny is an old man, and an invalid. He may make a will in Mr. Darrell's favour, and die before you are in a position to tell him of his nephew's treachery to your poor father."

Eleanor was silent for a few moments. Her arched brows contracted, and her mouth grew compressed and rigid.

"I must go back to Hazlewood, Dick," she said, slowly. "Yes, you are right; there is no time to be lost. I *must* go back to Hazlewood."

"That is not very practicable, is it, Nell?"

"I *must* go back. If I go in some disguise — if I go and hide myself in the village, and watch Launcelot Darrell when he least thinks he is observed. I don't care how I go, Richard, but I must be there. It can only be from the discoveries I make in the present, that I shall be able to trace my way back to the history of the past. I must go there."

"And begin at once upon the business of a detective? Eleanor, you shall not do this, if I can prevent you."

Richard Thornton's unavowed love gave him a certain degree of authority over the impulsive girl. There is always a dignity and power in every feeling that is really true. Throughout the story of Notre Dame de Paris, the hunchback's love for Esmeralda is never once contemptible. It is only Phœbus, handsome, glittering, and false, who provokes our scorn.

Eleanor Vane did not rebel against the young man's tone of authority.

"Oh, Dick, Dick," she cried, piteously, "I know how wicked I am. I have been nothing but a trouble

to you and the dear Signora. But I cannot forget my father's death. I cannot forget the letter he wrote to me. I must be true to the vow I made then, Richard, if I sacrifice my life in keeping my word."

Eliza Piccirillo came in before the scene-painter could reply to this speech. It had been agreed between the two young people that the Signora should know nothing of Miss Vane's discoveries; so Eleanor and Richard saluted the music-mistress in that strain of factitious gaiety generally adopted under such circumstances.

Signora Piccirillo's perceptions were perhaps a little blunted by the wear and tear of half a-dozen hours' labour amongst her out-door pupils, and as Eleanor bustled about the room preparing the tea-table and making the tea, the good music-mistress fully believed in her protégée's simulated liveliness. When the table had been cleared, and Richard had gone to smoke his short meerschaum amongst the damp straw and invalid cabs in the promenade before the Pilasters, Eleanor seated herself at the piano in order to escape the necessity of conversation. Her fingers flew over the keys in a thousand complexities of harmony, but her mind, for ever true to one idea, brooded upon the dark scheme of vengeance which she had planned for herself.

"Come what may," she thought, again and again, "at any price I must go back to Hazlewood."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The One Chance.

ELEANOR VANE lay awake through the greater part of the night which succeeded her interview with the shipbroker. She lay awake, trying to fashion for herself some scheme by which she might go back to Hazlewood. The discovery which she had to make, the proof positive that she wanted to obtain of Launcelot Darrell's guilt, could only be procured by long and patient watching of the young man himself. The evidence that was to condemn him must come from his own lips. Some chance admission, some accidental word, might afford a clue that would guide her back to the secret of the past. But to obtain this clue she must be in intimate association with the man whom she suspected. In the careless confidence of daily life, in the freedom of social intercourse, a hundred chances might occur which could never be brought about while the gates of Hazlewood were closed upon her.

There was one other chance, it was true. Launcelot Darrell had asked her to become his wife. His love, however feeble to withstand the wear and tear of time, must for the moment, at least, be real. A line from her would no doubt bring him to her side. She could lure him on by affecting to return his affection, and in the entire confidence of such an association she might discover the truth.

No! not for the wide world — not even to be true to her dead father — could she be so false to every sentiment of womanly honour.

"Richard was right," she thought, as she dismissed this idea with a humiliating sense of her own baseness in having even for one brief moment entertained it. "He was right. What shame and degradation I must wade through before I can keep my promise."

And to keep her promise she must go back to Hazlewood. This was the point to which she always returned. But was it possible for her to regain her old position in Mrs. Darrell's house? Would not Mrs. Darrell take care to keep her away, having once succeeded in banishing her from Launcelot's society?

Miss Vane was not a good schemer. Transparent, ingenuous, and impulsive, she had the will and the courage which would have prompted her to denounce Launcelot Darrell as a traitor and a cheat; but she did not possess one of the attributes which are necessary for the watcher who hopes to trace a shameful secret through all the dark intricacies of the hidden pathway that leads to it.

It was long after daylight when the young lady fell asleep, worn out, harassed, and baffled. The night had brought no counsel. Eleanor Vane dropped off into a fitful slumber, with a passionate prayer upon her lips, — a prayer that Providence would set her in the way of bringing vengeance upon her father's destroyer.

She flung herself upon Providence — after the manner of a great many persons — when she found her own intellect powerless to conduct her to the end she wanted to gain.

Throughout the next day Miss Vane sat alone on the chintz-covered sofa by the window, looking down at the children playing hop-sotch, and gambling for

marbles upon the rugged flags below; "weary of the rolling hours," and unable to bring herself to the frame of mind necessary for the ordinary purposes of life. Upon any other occasion she would have tried to do something whereby she might lighten the Signora's burden, being quite competent to take the pupils off her friend's hands; but to-day she had suffered Eliza Piccirillo to trudge out under the broiling August sky, through the stifling London streets, and had made no attempt to lessen her labours. She seemed even incapable of performing the little domestic offices which she had been in the habit of doing. She let the London dust accumulate upon the piano; she left the breakfast-table scattered with the débris of the morning's meal; she made no effort to collect the stray sheets of music, the open books, the scraps of needlework that littered the room; but with her elbow on the smoky sill of the window, and her head resting on her hand, she sat, looking wearily out, with eyes that saw nothing but vacancy.

Richard had gone out early, and neither he nor his aunt were expected to return till dusk.

"I can have everything ready for them when they come back," she thought, looking listlessly at the unwashed tea-things, which seemed to stare at her in mute reproachfulness; and then her eyes wandered back to the sunny window, and her mind returned with a cruel constancy to the one idea that occupied it.

Had she been really looking at the objects on which her eyes seemed to be fixed, she must have been surprised by the advent of a tall and rather distinguished-looking stranger, who made his way along the straw-littered promenade, between the colonnade and the

stables, erasing the chalk diagrams of the hop-sotch players with the soles of his boots, and rendering himself otherwise objectionable to the juvenile population.

This stranger came straight to the shop of the shoemaker with whom Signora Piccirillo lodged, and inquired for Miss Vincent.

The shoemaker had only heard Eleanor's assumed name a day or two before, when Laura's letter had arrived at the Pilasters. He had a vague idea that the beautiful, golden-haired young woman, who had first entered his dwelling in the early freshness of budding girlhood was going to distinguish herself as a great musical genius, and intended to astonish the professional world under a false name.

"It's Miss Eleanor you want, I suppose, sir?" the man said, in answer to the stranger's question.

"Miss Eleanor — yes."

"Then, if you'll please to step up-stairs, sir. The young lady's all alone to-day, for Mr. Richard he's over the water a scene-paintin' away for dear life, and the S'nora she's out givin' lessons; so poor young miss is alone, and dismal enough she must be, cooped indoors this fine weather. It's bad enough when one's obliged to it, you know, sir," the man added, rather obscurely. "Will you please to walk up, sir? It's the door facing you at the top of the stairs."

The shoemaker opened a half-glass door communicating with a dingy back parlour and a steep staircase that twisted corkscrew-wise up to the first floor. The visitor waited for no further invitation, but ascended the stairs in a few strides, and paused for a moment before the door of Signora Piccirillo's sitting-room.

"He's one of these here London managers, I des-

say," thought the simple cordwainer, as he went back to his work. "Mr. Cromshaw come here one day after Mr. Richard, in a pheeaton and pair, and no end of diamond rings and breast-pins."

Eleanor Vane had not noticed the stranger's footsteps on the uncarpeted stair, but she started when the door opened, and looked round. Her unexpected visitor was Mr. Monckton.

She rose in confusion, and stood with her back to the window, looking at the lawyer. She was too much absorbed by her one idea to be troubled by the untidiness of the shabby chamber, by the disorder of her own hair or dress, or by any of those external circumstances which are generally so embarrassing to a woman. She only thought of Gilbert Monckton as a link between herself and Hazlewood. She did not even wonder why he had come to see her.

"I may find out something; I may learn something from him," she thought.

Against the great purpose of her life, even this man, whom of all others she most respected and esteemed, sank into utter insignificance. She never cared to consider what he might think. She only regarded him as an instrument which might happen to be of use to her.

"You are very much surprised to see me, Miss Vincent," the lawyer said, holding out his hand.

The girl put her hand loosely in his, and Gilbert Monckton started as he felt the feverish heat of the slim fingers that touched his so lightly. He looked into Eleanor's face. The excitement of the last three days had left its traces on her countenance.

Mrs. Darrell had made a confidant of the lawyer. It had been absolutely necessary to explain Eleanor's

absence. Mrs. Darrell had given her own version of the business, telling the truth with sundry reservations. Miss Vincent was a handsome and agreeable girl, she said; it was of vital consequence to Launcelot that he should not form any attachment, or entertain any passing fancy, that might militate against his future prospects. An imprudent marriage had alienated her, Mrs. Darrell, from her uncle, Maurice de Crespigny. An imprudent marriage might ruin the young man's chance of inheriting the Woodlands estate. Under these circumstances it was advisable that Miss Vincent should leave Hazlewood; and the young lady had very generously resigned her situation upon the matter being put before her in a proper light.

Mrs. Darrell took very good care not to make any allusion to that declaration of love which she had overheard through the half-open door of her son's painting-room.

Mr. Monckton had expressed no little vexation at the sudden departure of his ward's companion; but his annoyance was of course felt solely on account of Miss Mason, who told him, with her eyes streaming, and her voice half-choked by sobs, that she could never, never be happy without her darling Eleanor.

The lawyer said very little in reply to these lamentations, but took care to get Miss Vincent's address from his ward, and on the day after his visit to Hazlewood went straight from his office to the Pilasters.

Looking at the change in Eleanor Vane's face, Mr. Monckton began to wonder very seriously if the departure from Hazlewood had been a matter of indifference to her; and whether it might not be that Mrs. Darrell's alarms about her son's possible admira-

tion for the penniless companion were founded on stronger grounds than the widow had cared to reveal to him.

"I was afraid that Laura's frivolous fancy might be caught by this young fellow" he thought, "but I could never have believed that this girl, who has ten times Laura's intellect, would fall in love with Launcelot Darrell."

He thought this, while Eleanor's feverish hand lay, loose and passive, in his own.

"It was not quite kind of you to leave Hazlewood without seeing me, or consulting me, Miss Vincent," he said: "you must remember that I confided to you a trust."

"A trust!"

"Yes. You promised that you would look after my foolish young ward, and take care that she did not fall in love with Mr. Darrell."

Mr. Monckton watched the girl's face very closely while he pronounced Launcelot Darrell's name, but there was no revelation in that pale and wearied countenance. The gray eyes returned his gaze, frankly and unhesitatingly. Their brightness was faded; but their innocent candour remained, in all its virginal beauty.

"I tried to do what you wished," Miss Vane answered. "I am afraid that Laura does admire Mr. Darrell. But I can't quite understand whether she is serious or not, and in any case nothing I could say would influence her much, though I know she loves me."

"No, I suppose not," said Mr. Monckton, rather bitterly, "women are not easily to be influenced in

these matters. A woman's love is the sublimation of selfishness, Miss Vincent. It is delightful to a woman to throw herself away; and she is perfectly indifferent as to how many unoffending victims she drags to destruction in her downfall. An Indian woman sacrifices herself out of respect to her dead husband. An English woman offers up her husband and children on the altar of a living lover. Pardon me if I speak too plainly. We lawyers become acquainted with strange stories. I should not at all wonder if my ward were to insist upon making herself miserable for life because Launcelot Darrell has a Grecian nose."

Mr. Monckton seated himself, uninvited, by the table on which the unwashed tea-things bore testimonies to Eleanor's neglect. He looked round the room, but not rudely; for in one brief observant glance he was able to see everything, and to understand everything.

"Have you ever *lived* here, Miss Vincent?" he asked.

"Yes, I lived here a year and a-half before I went to Hazlewood. I was very happy," Eleanor added hastily, as if in deprecation of the lawyer's look, which betrayed a half-compassionate interest. "My friends are very good to me, and I never wish for a better home."

"But you have been accustomed to a better home, in your childhood?"

"No, not very much better. I always lived in lodgings, with my poor father."

"Your father was not rich then?"

"No, not at all rich."

"He was a professional man, I suppose?"

"No, he had no profession. He had been rich — very rich — once."

The colour rose to Eleanor's face as she spoke, for she suddenly recollected that she had a secret to keep. The lawyer might recognise George Vane by this description, she thought.

Gilbert Monckton fancied that sudden blush arose from wounded pride.

"Forgive me for asking you so many questions, Miss Vincent," he said gently. "I am very much interested in you. I have been very much interested in you for a long time."

He was silent for some minutes. Eleanor had resumed her seat near the window, and sat in a thoughtful attitude, with her eyes cast upon the ground. She was wondering how she was to make good use of this interview, and discover as much as possible of Launcelot Darrell's antecedents.

"Will you forgive me if I ask you a few more questions, Miss Vincent?" the lawyer asked, after this brief silence.

Eleanor raised her eyes, and looked him full in the face. That bright, straight, unfaltering gaze was perhaps the greatest charm which Miss Vane possessed. She had no reason to complain that Nature had gifted her with a niggardly hand; she had beauty of feature, of outline, of colour; but this exquisitely candid expression was a rarer beauty, and a higher gift.

"Believe me," said Mr. Monckton, "that I am actuated by no unworthy motive when I ask you to deal frankly with me. You will understand, by-and-by, why and by what right I presume to question you.

In the meantime I ask you to confide in me. You left Hazlewood at Mrs. Darrell's wish, did you not?"

"Yes; it was at her wish that I left."

"Her son had made you an offer of his hand?"

The question would have brought a blush to the face of an ordinary girl. But Eleanor Vane was removed from ordinary women by the exceptional story of her life. From the moment of her discovery of Launcelot Darrell's identity, all thought of him as a lover, or an admirer, had been blotted out of her mind. He was removed from other men by the circumstances of his guilt; as she was set apart from other women by the revengeful purpose in her breast.

"Yes," she said. "Mr. Darrell asked me to be his wife."

"And did you — did you refuse him?"

"No; I gave him no answer."

"You did not love him then?"

"Love him! Oh, no, no!"

Her eyes dilated with a look of surprise as she spoke, as if it was most astounding to her that Gilbert Monckton should ask such a question.

"Perhaps you do not think Launcelot Darrell worthy of a good woman's love?"

"I do not," answered Eleanor. "Don't talk of him, please. At least, I mean, don't talk of him, and of — love," she added hastily, remembering that the very thing she wished was that the lawyer should talk of Launcelot Darrell. "You — you must know a great deal of his youth. He was idle and dissipated, was he not; and — and a card-player?"

"A card-player?"

"Yes — a gambler; a man who plays cards for the sake of winning money?"

"I never heard any one say so. He was idle, no doubt, and loitered away his time in London under the pretence of studying art; but I never remember hearing that gambling was one of his vices. However, I don't come here to speak of him, but of you. What are you going to do, now that you have left Hazlewood?"

Eleanor was cruelly embarrassed by this question. Her most earnest wish was to return to Hazlewood, or at least to the neighbourhood of Launcelot Darrell's home. Absorbed by this wish she had formed no scheme for the future. She had not even remembered that she stood alone in the world, with only a few pounds saved out of her slender salary, unprovided with that which is the most necessary of all weapons in any warfare, Money!

"I — I scarcely know what I shall do," she said. "Mrs. Darrell promised to procure me a situation."

But as she spoke she remembered that to accept a situation of Mrs. Darrell's getting would be in some manner to eat bread provided by the kinswoman of her father's foe, and she made a mental vow to starve rather than to receive the widow's patronage.

"I do not put much confidence in Mrs. Darrell's friendship when her own end is gained," Gilbert Monckton said thoughtfully. "Ellen Darrell is only capable of loving one person, and that person is, according to the fashion of the world, the one who has used her worst. She loves her son, Launcelot, and would sacrifice a hecatomb of her fellow-creatures for his advantage. If she can get you a new home, I dare say she will do so. If she cannot, she has suc-

ceeded in removing you from her son's pathway, and will trouble herself very little about your future."

Eleanor Vane lifted her head with a sudden gesture of pride.

"I do not want Mrs. Darrell's help," she said.

"But you would not refuse the counsel, or even the help of any one you liked, would you, Eleanor?" returned the lawyer. "You are very young, very inexperienced, — the life at Hazlewood suited you, and it might have gone on for years without danger of unhappiness or disquiet, but for the coming of Launcelot Darrell. I have known you for a year and a-half, Miss Vincent, and I have watched you very closely. I think I know you very well. Yes, if a lawyer's powers of penetration and habit of observation are to go for anything, I *must* know you by this time. I may have been an egregious fool twenty years ago; but I must be wise enough now to understand a girl of eighteen."

He said this rather as if reasoning with himself than talking to Eleanor. Miss Vane looked at him, wondering what all this talk would lead to, and what motive, under heaven, could have induced a lawyer of high standing to leave his chambers in the middle of the business day, for the purpose of sitting in a shabby lodging-house chamber, with his elbow resting upon a dirty table-cloth amid the confusion of unwashed breakfast cups and saucers.

"Eleanor Vincent," Mr. Monckton said by-and-by, after a very long pause, "country people are most intolerable gossips. You cannot have lived at Hazlewood for a year and a-half without having heard something of my history."

"Your history?"

"Yes, you heard that there was some secret trouble in the early part of my life — that there were some unpleasant circumstances connected with my purchase of Tolldale."

Eleanor Vane was unskilled in the art of prevarication. She could not give an evasive answer to a straight question.

"Yes," she said, "I have heard people say that."

"And you have no doubt heard them say that my trouble — like every other trouble upon this earth, as it seems to me — was caused by a woman."

"Yes, I heard that."

"I was very young when that sorrow came to me, Eleanor Vincent, and very ready to believe in a beautiful face. I was deceived. My story is all told in those three words, and it is a very old story after all. Great tragedies and epic poems have been written upon the same theme until it has become so hackneyed that I have no need to enlarge upon it. I was deceived, Miss Vincent, and for twenty years I have profited by that bitter lesson. Heaven help me if I feel inclined to forget it now. I am forty years of age, but I do not think that the brightness of my life has quite gone yet. Twenty years ago I was in love, and in the ardour and freshness of my youth, I dare say I talked a great deal of nonsense. I am in love once more, Eleanor. Will you forgive me if all my faculty for sentimental talk is lost? Will you let me tell you, in very few and simple words, that I love you; that I have loved you for a long time; and that you will make me unspeak-

ably happy if you can think my earnest devotion worthy of some return?"

Every vestige of colour faded slowly from Eleanor's face. There had been a time — before the return of Launcelot Darrell — when a word of praise, an expression of friendliness or regard from Gilbert Monckton, had been very precious to her. She had never taken the trouble to analyse her feelings. That time, before the coming of the young man, had been the sunniest and most careless period of her youth. She had during that interval been false to the memory of her father — she had suffered herself to be happy. But now a gulf yawned between her and that lapse of forgetfulness. She could not look back clearly; she could not remember or recall her former feelings. Gilbert Monckton's offer might then have awakened some answering sentiment in her own breast. Now his hand struck upon the slackened chords of a shattered instrument; and there was no music to respond harmoniously to the player's touch.

"Can you love me, Eleanor? Can you love me?" the lawyer asked, imploringly, taking the girl's two hands in his own. "Your heart is free: yes, I know that; and that at least is something. Heaven forgive me if I try to bribe you. But my youth is passed, and I can scarcely expect to be loved for myself alone. Think how dreary and undefended your life must be, if you refuse my love and protection. Think of that, Eleanor. Ah! if you knew what a woman is when thrown upon the world *without* the shelter of a husband's love, you would think seriously. I want you to be more than my wife, Eleanor. I want you to be the guardian and protectress of that poor frivolous girl

whose future has been trusted to my care. I want you to come and live at Tolldale, my darling, so as to be near that poor child at Hazlewood."

Near Hazlewood! The hot blood rushed into Eleanor's face at the sound of those two words, then faded suddenly away and left her deadly white, trembling and clinging to the back of her chair for support. To all else that Gilbert Monckton had said she had listened in a dull stupor. But now her intellect arose and grasped the full importance of the lawyer's supplication. In a moment she understood that the one chance which of all other things upon this earth she had most desired, and which of all other things had seemed furthest removed from her, was now within her reach.

She might go back to Hazlewood. She might return as Gilbert Monckton's wife. She did not stop to consider how much was involved in this. It was her nature to be ruled by impulse, and impulse only; and she had yet to learn submission to a better guidance. She could go back to Hazlewood. She would have returned there as a kitchen-maid, had the opportunity of so doing offered itself to her; and she was ready to return as Gilbert Monckton's wife.

"My prayers have been heard," she thought. "My prayers have been heard: Providence will give me power to keep my promise. Providence will set me face to face with that man."

Eleanor Vane stood with her hands clasped upon the back of her chair, thinking of this, and looking straight before her, in utter unconsciousness of the earnest eyes that were fixed upon her face, while the lawyer waited breathlessly to hear her decision.

"Eleanor," he cried, entreatingly, "Eleanor, I have

been deceived once; do not let me be a woman's dupe, now that there are streaks of grey amongst my hair. I love you, my dear. I can make you independent and secure; but I do not offer you a fortune or a position of sufficient magnitude or grandeur to tempt an ambitious woman. For God's sake do not trifle with me. If you love me now, or can hope to love me in the future, be my wife. But if any other image holds the smallest place in your heart — if there is one memory, or one regret, that can come between us, Eleanor, dismiss me from you unhesitatingly. It will be merciful to me — to you also, perhaps — to do so. I have seen many a union in which there has been love on one side, and indifference — or something worse than indifference — upon the other. Eleanor, think of all this, and then tell me, frankly, if you can be my wife."

Eleanor Vane dimly comprehended that there was a depth of passionate feeling beneath the quiet earnestness of the lawyer's manner. She tried to listen, she tried to understand; but she could not. The one idea which held possession of her mind, kept that mind locked against every other impression. It was not his love, it was not his name or his fortune, that Gilbert Monckton offered her — he offered her the chance of returning to Hazlewood.

"You are very good to me," she said. "I will be your wife. I will go back to Hazlewood."

She held out her hand to him. No trace of womanly confusion, or natural coquetry, betrayed itself in her manner. Pale and absorbed she held out her hand, and offered up her Future as a small and unconsidered matter, when set against the one idea of her life — the promise to her dead father.

CHAPTER XXV.

Accepted.

WHEN a man sets his happiness in the balance he is apt to be contented with a very slight turning of the scale. He is not likely to be critical as to the wording of the verdict which gives him the prize he has asked for.

Mr. Gilbert Monckton had no contemptible opinion of his own judgment and deliberation, his perceptive faculties and powers of reasoning; but as blindly as *Macbeth* accepted the promises of the oracular voices in the witches' cave, so did this grave and eminent lawyer receive those few cold words in which Eleanor Vane consented to be his wife.

It was not that he refrained from reflecting upon the girl's manner of accepting his offer. He did reflect upon it; and proved to himself, by unerring logic, that she could scarcely have spoken in any other way. There were a thousand reasons why she should have employed those very words, and pronounced them in that very tone. Maidenly modesty, innocent surprise, inexperience, girlish timidity: — he ran over a whole catalogue of causes, naming every possible cause, save one, and that one was the thing he had most dreaded — indifference, or even repugnance to himself. He looked into her face. His professional career had given him the faculty of putting together the evidences of smiles and frowns, involuntary contractions of the eyebrows, scarcely perceptible compressions of the lips,

every tone and semi-tone in the facial diapason. He looked at Eleanor Vane's face, and said to himself:

"This girl *cannot* be mercenary. She is as pure as an angel; as unselfish as Jephtha's daughter; as brave as Judith, or Joan of Arc. She *cannot* be anything but a good wife. The man who wins her has reason to thank God for His bounty."

It was with such thoughts as these that the lawyer received the feminine decision which was to influence his future life. He bent over the girl's fair head — tall as she was, her face was only on a level with Gilbert Monckton's shoulder — and pressed his lips to her forehead, solemnly, almost as if setting a seal upon his own.

"My darling," he said, in a low voice, "my darling, you have made me very happy; I dare not tell you how much I love you. I struggled against my love, Eleanor. I once meant to have kept the secret till I went down to my grave. I think I could have kept silence so long as you remained within my reach, protected and sheltered by people whom I could trust, happy in the bright years of your innocent girlhood. But when you left Hazlewood, when you went out into the world, my courage failed. I wanted to give you my love as a shield and a defence. Better that I should be deceived, I thought; better that I should be miserable, than that she should be undefended."

Eleanor Vane listened to the lawyer's happy talk. He could have talked to her for ever, now that the ice was broken, and the important step — so long considered, so long avoided — actually taken. It seemed as if his youth came back to him, bestowed by some miraculous power; invisible, but most palpably

present in that shabby Bloomsbury dwelling. His youth came back: the intellectual cobwebs of twenty years were swept away by one stroke of some benevolent witch's broomstick. Cherished prejudices, fondly nursed doubts and suspicions, were blotted out of his mind, leaving the tablet fair and bright as it had been before the coming of that shadow which had darkened so much of this man's life. Sudden almost as the conversion of Saul, was this transformation of the misanthropical solicitor under the master influence of a true and pure affection.

For twenty years he had sneered at women, and at men's belief in them; and now, at the end of twenty years, he believed; and, escaping out of the prison which he had made for himself, he spread his recovered wings and was free.

A sigh escaped from Eleanor's lips as she listened to her lover. The time in which she could have hoped to pay him back all this great debt which he was heaping upon her, was past and gone. She felt a sense of oppression beneath the load of this obligation. She began to perceive — as yet only dimly, so intense was the egotism engendered out of the single purpose of her life — that she was binding herself to something that she might not be able to perform; she was taking upon herself a debt that she could scarcely hope to pay. For a moment she thought this, and was ready, under this new impulse, to draw back and say, "I cannot become your wife; I am too much tied and bound by the obligations of the past, to be able to fulfil the duties of the present. I am set apart from other women, and must stand alone until the task I

have set myself is accomplished, or the hope of its fulfilment abandoned."

She thought this, and the words trembled on her lips; but in the next moment the image of her father arose angry and reproachful, as if to say to her, "Have you so little memory of my wrongs and my sorrows that you can shrink from any means of avenging me?"

This idea banished every other consideration.

"I will keep my promise first, and do my duty to Gilbert Monckton afterwards," thought Eleanor. "It will be easy to be a good wife to him. I used to like him very much."

She recalled the old days in which she had sat a little way apart from the lawyer and his ward, envying Laura Mason her apparent influence over Mr. Monckton; and for a moment a faint thrill of pleasure and triumph vibrated through her veins as she remembered that henceforth her claim upon him would be higher than that of any other living creature. He would be her own — her lover, her husband — adviser, friend, instructor; everything in the wide world to her.

"Oh, let me avenge my father's cruel death," she thought, "and then I may be a good and happy wife."

Mr. Monckton could have stood for ever by the side of his betrothed wife in the sunny window looking out upon the mews. The prospect of the half-open stable doors; the lounging grooms smoking and drinking in the intervals of their labour; the scantily draperied women hanging out newly-washed linen, and

making as it were triumphal arches of wet garments across the narrow thoroughfare; the children playing hop-sotch, or called away from that absorbing diversion to fetch damp steaming quartern loaves and jugs of beer for their elders, — all these things were beautiful in the eyes of the owner of Tolldale Priory. An overplus of that sunshine which filled his own breast glorified these common objects, and Mr. Monckton gazed upon the angular proportions of the bony Roman-nosed horses, the classic outlines of decrepit Hansom cabs, and all the other objects peculiar to the neighbourhood of the Pilasters, with such a radiance of contentment and delight upon his countenance as might have induced the observer, looking at the lawyer's face and *not* at the prospect, to believe that the bay of Naples was spread out in purple splendour under the open window of Miss Vane's sitting-room.

Signora Piccirillo returned from her day's labours, and found Eleanor's visitor thus absorbed; but he understood directly who she was, and greeted her with a cordiality that very much astonished the music mistress. Eleanor Vane slipped out of the room while Mr. Monckton was explaining himself to the Signora. She was only too glad to get away from the man to whom she had so rashly bound herself. She went to the glass to brush her hair away from her hot forehead, and then threw herself on the bed, prostrated by all the excitement she had undergone, powerless even to think.

"I almost wish I could lie here for ever," she thought; "it seems so like peace to lie still and leave off thinking." Her youth had held out bravely against the burdens she had put upon her strength and spirits,

but the young energies had given way at last, and she fell into a heavy dreamless slumber; a blessed and renovating sleep, from which nature takes compensation for the wrongs that have been done her.

Gilbert Monckton told his story very briefly and simply. He had no occasion to say much himself, for Eleanor had written a great deal about him in her letters to the Signora, and had often talked of him during her one holiday at the Pilasters.

Eliza Piccirillo was too entirely unselfish to feel otherwise than pleased at the idea that Eleanor Vane had won the love of a good man, whose position in life would remove her from every danger and from every trial. But, mingled with this unselfish delight, there was a painful recollection. The music mistress had fathomed her nephew's secret; and she felt that Eleanor's marriage would be a sad blow to Richard Thornton.

"I don't believe poor Dick ever hoped to win her love," Signora Piccirillo thought; "but if he could have gone on loving her and admiring her, and associating with her, in a frank brotherly way, he might have been happy. Perhaps it's better as it is, though; perhaps that very uncertainty might have blighted his life and shut him out from some possible happiness."

"As my dear girl is an orphan," Gilbert Monckton said, "I feel that you, Madame Piccirillo, are the only person I need consult. I have heard from Eleanor how much she owes you; and believe me that when I ask her to become my wife, I do not wish her to be less your adopted daughter. She has told me that in the greatest miseries of her life, you were as true a friend to her as her own mother could have been. She

has never told me what those miseries were, but I trust her so fully that I do not care to torment her with questions about a past which she tells me was sorrowful."

Eliza Piccirillo's eyelids fell under the earnest gaze of the lawyer; she remembered the deception that had been practised upon Mrs. Darrell in deference to the pride of Eleanor's half-sister.

"This Mr. Monckton must know Nelly's story before he marries her," thought the straightforward Signora. She explained this to Eleanor the next morning when the girl rose, invigorated by a long sleep, and inspired by a desperate hopefulness — the hope of speedily avenging her father's wrongs.

For some time Miss Vane passionately combated the Signora's arguments. Why should she tell Gilbert Monckton her real name? she demanded. She wished to keep it a secret from Mr. de Crespigny; from the people at Hazlewood. She must keep it a secret, she said.

But little by little Eliza Piccirillo overcame this determination. She explained to the passionate girl that if her marriage was to be legally unassailable, she must be married in her true name. She explained this; and she said a great deal about the moral wrong which would be done if Eleanor persisted in deceiving her future husband.

The marriage was pushed on with terrible haste, as it seemed to Richard Thornton and the Signora; but even the brief delay that occurred between Gilbert Monckton's declaration of his love and the day fixed for the wedding was almost intolerable to Eleanor. The all-important step which was to make her the

lawyer's wife seemed nothing to her. She ignored this great crisis of her life altogether, in her desire to return to Hazlewood, to discover and denounce Launcelot Darrell's treachery before Maurice de Crespigny's death.

There were preparations to be made, and a trousseau to be provided. It was a very simple trousseau, fitter for the bride of some young curate with seventy pounds a year, than for the lady who was to be mistress of Tolldale Priory. Eleanor took no interest in the pretty girlish dresses, pale and delicate in colour, simple and inexpensive in texture and fashion, which the Signora chose for her protégée. There was a settlement to be drawn up also; for Gilbert Monckton insisted upon treating his betrothed as generously as if she had been a woman of distinction, with an aristocratic father to bargain and diplomatisé for her welfare; but Eleanor was as indifferent to the settlement as about the trousseau, and could scarcely be made to understand that, on and after her wedding-day, she would be the exclusive possessor of a small landed estate worth three hundred a year.

Once, and once only, she thanked Gilbert Monckton for his generosity; and this was when, for the first time, the thought flashed into her mind, that this three hundred a year, to which she was so indifferent, would enable her to place Eliza Piccirillo in a position of independence.

"Dear Signora," she cried, "you shall never work after I am married. How good it is of you to give me this money, Mr. Monckton," she added, her eyes filling with sudden tears; "I will try to deserve your goodness, I will indeed."

It was upon the evening on which Eleanor spoke these few grateful and earnest words to her betrothed husband, that the revelation of her secret was made.

"I am going to Doctor's Commons to-morrow morning, Signora," the lawyer said, as he rose to leave the little sitting-room, — he had spent his evenings in the Pilasters during his brief courtship, perfectly at home, and unspeakably happy in that shabby and Bohemian colony. "Eleanor and I have determined that our marriage is to take place at St. George's, Bloomsbury. It is to be a very quiet wedding. My two partners, yourself, and Mr. Thornton, are to be the only witnesses. The Berkshire people will be surprised when I take my young wife back to Toll-dale."

He was going away, when the Signora laid her hand on Eleanor's shoulder.

"You *must* tell him to-night, Nelly," she whispered; "he must not be allowed to take out the licence in a false name."

The girl bent her head.

"I will do as you wish, Signora," she said.

Five minutes afterwards, when Gilbert Monckton gave Eleanor his hand, she said, quietly:

"Do not say good night yet. I will come downstairs with you, I have something to say to you."

She went down the narrow staircase, and out into the colonnade with Mr. Monckton. It was ten o'clock; the shops were closed, and the public-house was quiet. Under the August moonlight the shabby tenements looked less common-place, the dilapidated wooden colonnade was almost picturesque. Miss Vane stood with her face turned frankly towards her lover, her

figure resting slightly against one of the slender pillars before the shoemaker's emporium.

"What is it that you want to tell me, Eleanor dearest?" Mr. Monckton asked, as she paused, looking half-doubtfully in his face, uncertain what she should say to him.

"I want to tell you that I have done very wrong — I have deceived you."

"Deceived me! Eleanor! Eleanor!"

She saw the lawyer's face turn pale under the moonlight. That word deception had such a terrible meaning to him.

"Yes, I have deceived you. I have kept a secret from you, and I can only tell it to you now upon one condition."

"Upon what condition?"

"That you do not tell it to Mr. de Crespigny, or to Mrs. Darrell, until you have my permission to do so."

Gilbert Monckton smiled. His sudden fears fled away before the truthfulness of the girl's voice, the earnestness of her manner.

"Not tell Mr. de Crespigny, or Mrs. Darrell?" he said, "of course not, my dear. Why should I tell them anything which concerns you, and that you wish me to keep from them?"

"You promise, then?"

"Most certainly."

"You give me your solemn promise that you will not tell Mr. de Crespigny, or any member of his family, the secret which I am going to confide to you; under no circumstances whatever, will you be tempted to break that promise?"

"Why, Nelly," cried Mr. Monckton, "you are as serious as if you were the chief of a political society, about to administer some terrible oath to a neophyte. I shall not break my promise, my dear, believe me. My profession has accustomed me to keeping secrets. What is it, Eleanor; what is this tremendous mystery?"

Miss Vane lifted her eyes, and looked full in her lover's face, upon the watch for any change of expression that might indicate displeasure or contempt. She was very fearful of losing the lawyer's confidence and esteem.

"When I went to Hazlewood," she said, "I went in a false name, not at my own wish, but to please my sister, who did not want Mrs. Darrell to know that any member of her family could be in a dependent position. My name is not Vincent. I am Eleanor Vane, the daughter of Mr. de Crespigny's old friend."

Gilbert Monckton's astonishment was unbounded. He had heard George Vane's history from Mrs. Darrell, but he had never heard of the birth of the old man's youngest daughter.

"Eleanor Vane," he said; "then Mrs. Bannister is your sister."

"She is my half-sister, and it was at her wish that I went to Hazlewood under a false name. You are not angry with me for having done so, are you?"

"Angry with you? No, my dear, the deception was harmless enough; though it was a piece of foolish pride upon your sister's part. My Eleanor was in no way degraded by having to turn her accomplishments to use and profit. My poor self-reliant girl," he added,

tenderly, "going out into the world with a secret to keep. But why do you wish this secret to be still preserved, Eleanor; you are not ashamed of your father's name?"

"Ashamed of his name? Oh, no, no!"

"Why keep your real name a secret, then?"

"I can't tell you why. But you'll keep your promise. You are too honourable to break your promise."

Mr. Monckton looked wonderingly at the girl's earnest face.

"No, my dear, I won't break my promise," he said. "But I can't understand your anxiety for this concealment. However, we will say nothing more about it, Nelly," he added, as if in reply to an appealing look from Miss Vane; "your name will be Monckton when you go back to Berkshire; and nobody will dare to question your right to that name."

The lawyer put his lips to the girl's forehead, and bade her good night upon the threshold of the shoemaker's door.

"God bless you, my own darling!" he said, in a very low voice, "and preserve our faith in each other. There must be no secrets between you and me, Nelly."

CHAPTER XXVI.

An Insidious Demon.

ON a bright September morning a hired carriage took Miss Vane and her friends to the quiet old church in Hart Street, Bloomsbury. There was a little crowd assembled about the door of the shoemaker's dwelling, and sympathetic spectators were scattered here and there in the mews, for a marriage is one of those things which the cleverest people can never contrive to keep a secret.

Miss Eleanor Vane's pale fawn-coloured silk dress, black mantle, and simple white bonnet did not form the established costume of a bride, but the young lady looked so very beautiful in her girlish dress and virginal innocence, that more than one of the lounging grooms who came out of the stables to see her go by to her hired carriage, confidentially remarked to an acquaintance that he only wished he could get such a young woman for *his* missus. Richard Thornton was not in attendance upon the fair young bride. There was a scene to be painted for Spavin and Cromshaw upon that particular day which was more important than any scene Dick had ever painted before. So the young man set out early upon that September bridal morning, after saluting Eleanor Vane in the most tender and brotherly fashion: but I am sorry to say that instead of going straight to the Royal Phoenix Theatre, Mr. Thornton walked with a slow and listless gait across Westminster Bridge, then plunged with a

sudden and almost ferocious impetus into the remotest intricacies of Lambeth, scowling darkly at the street boys who came in his way, skirting the Archbishop's palace, glowering at the desolation of Vauxhall, and hurrying far away into the solitudes of Battersea fields, where he spent the better part of the afternoon in the dreary parlour of an obscure public-house, drinking adulterated beer, and smoking bad tobacco.

The Signora wore a rustling black silk dress — Eleanor's present of the previous Christmas — in honour of her protégée's wedding; but Eliza Piccirillo's heart was sadly divided upon this quiet bridal day; half rejoicing in Miss Vane's fortune and advancement; half sorrowful for poor desolate Dick wandering away amongst the swamps by the waterside.

Mr. Monckton and his two partners were waiting for the bride in the portico of the church. The senior of the two, an old man with white hair, was to give Eleanor away, and paid her many appropriate though rather obsolete compliments upon the occasion. Perhaps it was now for the first time that Miss Vane began to regard the step she was about to take as one of a somewhat serious and indeed awful nature; perhaps it was now for the first time that she began to think she had committed a sin in accepting Gilbert Monckton's love so lightly.

"If he knew that I did not promise to 'marry him because I loved him, but because I wanted to get back to Hazlewood," she thought.

But presently the grave shadows passed away from her face and a faint blush rose to her cheek and brow.

"I will love him by-and-by, when I have avenged my father's death," she said to herself.

Some such thought as this was in her mind when she took her place beside Gilbert Monckton at the altar.

The autumn sunshine streamed in upon them through the great windows of the church, and wrapped them in yellow light, like the figures of Joseph and Mary in an old picture. The bride and bridegroom looked very handsome standing side by side in this yellow sunshine. Gilbert Monckton's twenty years' seniority only dignified and exalted him; investing the holy marriage promise of love and protection with a greater solemnity than it could have had when spoken by a stripling of one or two and twenty.

Everything seemed auspicious upon this wedding morning. The lawyer's partners were in the highest spirits, the beadle and pew-opener were elevated by the idea of prospective donations. The Signora wept quietly while the marriage service was being read, thinking of her nephew Richard smoking and drinking desperately, perhaps, in his desolate painting-room: but when the ceremony was over the good music-mistress dried her tears, banishing all traces of sorrow before she kissed and complimented the bride.

"You are to come and see us at the Priory, dear Signora," Eleanor said, as she clung about her friend before leaving the vestry; "Gilbert says so, you know."

Her voice faltered a little, and she glanced shyly at her husband as she spoke of him by his christian name. It seemed as if she had no right to allude so familiarly to Mr. Monckton, of Tolldale Priory. And

presently Eliza Piccirillo stood alone — or attended only by the beadle, obsequiously attentive in proportion to the liberality of the donation he had just received—under the portico of the Bloomsbury church, watching the lawyer's carriage drive away towards the Great Northern railway station. Mr. Monckton, in the absence of any preference upon Eleanor's part, had chosen a quiet Yorkshire watering-place as the scene of his honeymoon.

Signora Piccirillo sighed as she went down the steps before the church, and took her seat in the hired vehicle that was to take her back to the Pilasters.

"So Bloomsbury has seen the last of Eleanor," she thought, sadly; "we may go down to see her, perhaps, in her grand new house, but she will never come back to us. She will never wash the tea-things and make tea and toast again for a tired-out old music-mistress."

The dying glory of red and orange in the last sunset of September sank behind the grey line of the German Ocean, after the closing day of Gilbert Monckton's honeymoon. Upon the first of October the lawyer was to take his young wife to Tolldale Priory. Mr. and Mrs. Monckton walked upon the broad sands as that low orange light faded out of the western sky. The lawyer was grave and silent, and every now and then cast a furtive glance at his companion's face. Sometimes that glance was succeeded by a sigh.

Eleanor was paler and more careworn than she had looked since the day after her visit to the shipbroker's office. The quiet and seclusion of the place to which Gilbert Monckton had brought his bride had given her ample opportunity of brooding on the one

idea of her life. Had he plunged her into a vortex of gaiety, it is possible that she might have been true to that deep-rooted purpose which she had so long nursed in her breast; but on the other hand, there would have been some hope that the delights of change and novelty, delights to which youth cannot be indifferent — might have beguiled the bride from that for-ever-recurring train of thought which separated her from her husband as effectually as if an ocean had rolled between them.

Yes, Gilbert Monckton had discovered the fatal truth that marriage is not always union, and that the holiest words that were ever spoken cannot weave the mystic web which makes two souls indissolubly one, if there be one inharmonious thread in the magical fabric. Gilbert Monckton felt this, and knew that there was some dissonant note in the chord which should have been such a melodious combination.

Again and again, while talking to his wife — carried away, perhaps, by the theme of which he was speaking, and counting on her sympathy as a matter of course — he had looked into Eleanor's face, and seen that her thoughts had wandered far away from him and his conversation, into some unknown region. He had no clue by which he could follow those wanderings; no chance word ever fell from his wife's lips which might serve as the traitor silk that guided ruthless Eleanor to Rosamond's hiding-place. So thus, before the honeymoon was over, Gilbert Monckton began to be jealous of his bride, thereby fostering for himself a nest of scorpions, or a very flock of young vultures, which were henceforth to make their meals off his entrails.

But it was not the ferocious or Othello-like jealousy. The green-eyed monster did not appear under his more rugged and uncivilised form, finding a vent for his passion in pillows, poison, and poniards. The monster disguised himself as a smooth and philosophical demon. He hid his diabolical attributes under the gravity and wisdom of a friendly sage. In other words, Gilbert Monckton, feeling disappointed at the result of his marriage, set himself to reason upon the fact; and was for ever torturing himself with silent arguments and mute conjectures as to the cause of that indescribable something in his young wife's manner, which told him there was no perfect union between them. The lawyer reproached himself for his weak folly in having built a fairy palace of hope upon the barren fact of Eleanor's acceptance of his hand. Did not girls, situated as George Vane's daughter had been situated, marry for money, again and again, in these mercenary days? Who should know this better than Gilbert Monckton the solicitor, who had drawn up so many marriage settlements, been concerned in so many divorces, and assisted in so many matrimonial bargains, whose sordid motives were as undisguised as in any sale of cattle transacted in the purlieus of Smithfield? Who should know better than he, that beautiful and innocent girls every day bartered their beauty and innocence for certain considerations set down by grave lawyers, and engrossed upon sheets of parchment at so much per sheet?

He did know this, and in his mad arrogance he had said to himself, "I — amongst all other men — will be an exception to the common rule. The girl I marry is poor; but she will give herself to me for no meaner considerations than my love, and my truth,

and my devotion; and those shall be hers until my dying day."

Gilbert Monckton had said this; and already a mocking demon had made a permanent perch for himself upon this wretched man's shoulders, for ever whispering insidious doubts into his ear, for ever instilling shadowy fears into his mind.

Eleanor had not seemed happy during these few honeymoon weeks. She had grown weary of the broad sands stretching far away, flat and desolate under the September sky, and weary of the everlasting and unbroken line that bounded that wide grey sea. This weariness she had displayed frankly enough; but she had not revealed its hidden source, which lay in her feverish impatience to go back to the neighbourhood of Hazlewood, and to make the discovery she wished to make, before Maurice de Crespigny's death.

She had sounded her husband upon the subject of the old man's health.

"Do you think Mr. de Crespigny will live long?" she asked, one day.

"Heaven knows, my dear," the lawyer answered carelessly. "He has been an invalid for nearly twenty years now, and he may go on being an invalid for twenty years more, perhaps. I fancy that his death will be very sudden whenever it does happen."

"And do you think that he will leave his money to Launcelot Darrell?"

Eleanor's face grew a little paler as she mentioned the young man's name. The invisible familiar perched upon Mr. Monckton's shoulder directed the lawyer's attention to that fact.

"I don't know. Why should you be interested in Mr. Darrell's welfare?"

"I am not interested in his welfare, I only asked you a question, Gilbert."

Even the malice of the familiar could take no objection to the tone in which Eleanor said this: and Mr. Monckton was ashamed of the passing twinge which Launcelot Darrell's name had caused him.

"I dare say de Crespigny will leave the money to young Darrell, my dear," he said, in a more cordial voice; "and though I have no very high opinion of the young man's character, I think he ought to have the fortune. The maiden ladies should have annuities, of course. Heaven knows they have fought hard enough for the prize."

"How can people act so contemptibly for the sake of money!" cried Eleanor, with sudden indignation.

The lawyer looked admiringly at her glowing face, which had crimsoned with the intensity of her feeling. She was thinking of her father's death, and of that hundred pounds which had been won from him on the night of his suicide.

"No," thought Mr. Monckton, "she cannot be mercenary. That bright, impulsive creature could never be guilty of any deliberate meanness, — and what could be a worse meanness than that of the woman who could marry a man out of sordid and mercenary motives, beguiling him by a simulated affection, in order to compass her own advancement?"

"If I have won her heart, in its untainted freshness," thought Gilbert Monckton, "I must be content, though that girlish heart may seem cold. She will love me better by-and-by. She will learn to confide in me; she will learn to sympathise with me."

By such arguments as these Mr. Monckton endeavoured to satisfy himself, and sometimes, indeed, succeeded in doing so, — that his young wife's absent and thoughtful manner was a matter of course; the thoughtfulness of a girl unused to her new position, and perhaps a little bewildered by its strangeness. But on the morning of the 1st of October, Gilbert Monckton perceived a change in Eleanor's manner, and on that morning the demon familiar took up a permanent station upon the lawyer's shoulder.

Mrs. Monckton was no longer grave and listless. A feverish impatience, a sudden flow of high spirits, seemed to have taken possession of her.

"You observe," whispered the demon familiar, as Mr. Monckton sat opposite his wife in a compartment of the express train that was to take them to London, *en route* for Berkshire, "you observe the glow in her cheeks, the brightness of her eyes. You saw her turn pale the other day when she mentioned Launcelot Darrell's name. You know what the young man's mother told you. You can do the commonest sum in logical arithmetic, I suppose. You can put two and two together. Your wife has been wearied to death of the north, and the sea, and the sands; and of *you*. She is in high spirits to-day, and it is very easy to account for the change in her manner. She is glad to go back to Berkshire — she is glad to go back there, because *she will see Launcelot Darrell*."

Mr. Monckton, with a cambric handkerchief thrown over his face, kept a covert watch upon his wife from between its artfully-adjusted folds, and enjoyed such converse as this with the spirit he had chosen for his companion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Slow Fires.

THE new life which began for Eleanor Monckton at Tolldale Priory seemed very strange to her. The prim respectability of the old mansion weighed heavily upon her spirits. The best part of her existence had been spent in a very free-and-easy and Bohemian manner; and her improved position was at first more strange than pleasant to her. The well-trained servants who waited upon her in respectful silence, acknowledging her as their mistress, and obsequiously eager to give her pleasure, were very different people to the familiar landladies of those lodgings in which she had lived with her father, or the good-natured shoemaker-landlord at the Pilasters.

At Hazlewood she had been only a dependant; and those who served her had given her their service out of love for her brightness and beauty; rendering her little benefits with frank smiles and familiar greetings. But the mistress of Tolldale had a certain dignity to support; and new duties to learn in her new position.

At first those duties seemed very hard to the impulsive girl, who had a sort of instinctive contempt for all ceremonial usages and stereotyped observances. They seemed more especially hard, perhaps, because Gilbert Monckton expected his young wife to assume her new position as a thing of course, and was inclined to be very jealous of any omission that derogated from her dignity.

He was inclined to be jealous of her girlish inconstancy of thought and action, seeing in all this an evidence that she regretted the freedom of her girlhood. He was inclined to be jealous. That one sentence reveals the secret of a great deal of misery which this gentleman made for himself. He was inclined to be jealous of anything and everything, where his young wife was concerned.

It was thus that Gilbert Monckton began his married life. It was thus that, of his own doing, he set a breach between himself and the woman he idolised. And when the breach was made, and the dreary gulf of distrust and misapprehension stretched black and impassable between this weak man and that which he loved dearest in all the world, he could only cast himself down beside the yawning ravine and bemoan his desolation.

I have called Gilbert Monckton a weak man advisedly. In all the ordinary business of life, and in all the extraordinary business that fell in his professional pathway, the lawyer's clearness of perception and power of intellect were unsurpassed by any of his compeers. Strong; stern; decided and unyielding, where his judgment was once formed; he was trusted as an oracle by those who had dealings with him. But in his love for his wife he was weaker and more irresolute than any desponding swain of five-and-twenty.

He had been deceived once by a woman whom he had loved as he now loved Eleanor; and he could not forget that early deception. The shadow that had fallen upon his life was not to be lifted off by any sunshine of trust and love. He had been deceived once, and he might be deceived again.

The wrong which a woman's falsehood does to the man whom she betrays is a lasting and sometimes irrecoverable wrong. The wound festers, deep down below the outer scar; and while sympathetic friends are rejoicing in the slow obliteration of that surface evidence of the past, the poison's corroding power still endures, gaining force by time.

The secret sorrow of Gilbert Monckton's youth had made him suspicious of all womanly truth and purity. He watched his wife, as it had been his habit to watch his ward, doubtfully and fearfully: even when he most admired her, regarding her in some wise as a capricious and irresponsible being, who might at any moment turn upon him and betray him.

He had fought against his love for his ward's beautiful companion. He had tried to shut his mind against all consciousness of her fascinations; he had endeavoured not to believe in her. If she had stayed at Hazlewood, that silent struggle might have gone on in the lawyer's breast for years; but her sudden departure had taken the grave man of forty off his guard: hurried away by an impulse, he had revealed the secret that had been so skilfully repressed, and, for the second time in his life, perilled his happiness upon the hazard of a woman's truth.

"What do I know of her more than I knew of Margaret Ravenshaw?" he thought, sometimes; "can I trust her because she looks full in my face, with eyes that are as clear as the sky above my head? There is generally some landmark by which a man's character can be understood, however practised he may be in hypocrisy; but a woman—— Bah! a woman's beauty defies a physiognomist. We trust and believe because

we admire. 'She can't be wicked with such a Grecian nose,' we say. 'Those exquisitely-moulded lips cannot speak anything but the truth!'"

If Gilbert Monckton's young wife had seemed happy in her new home, he would have accepted the fair omen, and would have sunned himself in the brightness of her gaiety. But she was not happy; he could clearly see that; and day and night he tormented himself with vain endeavours to find out the cause of her uncertain spirits, her fits of abstraction, her long pauses of thoughtful silence.

And while Mrs. Monckton's husband was nursing all these tortures, and every day widening the gulf of his own making, his wife, absorbed by her own secret purpose, was almost unconscious of all else in the world. If she saw the lawyer's face thoughtful or gloomy, she concluded that his moodiness arose from business anxieties with which she had no concern. If he sighed, she set down his melancholy to the same professional causes. A tiresome will case, a troublesome chancery suit — something in those dusty offices had annoyed him; and that professional something had of course no concern for her.

Eleanor Monckton had taken upon herself an unnatural office; she had assumed an abnormal duty; and her whole life fashioned itself to fit that unwomanly purpose. She abnegated the privileges, and left unperformed the duties, of a wife — true to nothing except to that fatal promise made in the first madness of her grief for George Vane's death.

She had been more than a week at Tolldale Priory, and she had not advanced one step upon the road

which she had so desperately determined to pursue. She had not yet seen Launcelot Darrell.

Gilbert Monckton had spent the day after his return to Berkshire in riding about the neighbourhood, calling upon those few people with whom he kept up any acquaintance, and informing them of his marriage with the young lady who, a few weeks before, had been the companion of his ward. Of course he received friendly congratulations and good wishes from every one to whom he imparted this intelligence; and of course when his back was turned, the same people who had tendered those good wishes set to work to wonder at his folly, and to prognosticate all manner of evil from his absurd and imprudent marriage.

His longest visit was paid to Hazlewood, and here his tidings afforded real and unmixed satisfaction. Launcelot Darrell was at work in his painting-room, and was therefore out of the way of hearing the news. The widow was pleased to think that Eleanor's marriage would secure her son against the immediate danger of taking a penniless wife; and Laura was sincerely rejoiced at the idea of seeing her friend again.

"I may come to Tolldale soon, mayn't I, Mr. Monckton?" she asked. "Dear Nelly, I do so long to see her! But to think of her being married to you! I never was so surprised in my life. Why you must be old enough to be her father. It does seem so funny!"

Gilbert Monckton did not feel particularly grateful to his ward for the extreme candour of these remarks, but he invited the young lady to spend the following day with Eleanor.

"I shall be in town to-morrow," he said, "and I dare say Mrs. Monckton will find the Priory dull."

"Mrs. Monckton!" cried Laura; "oh, to be sure; why, that's Nelly, of course! Find the Priory dull? Yes, I should think she would indeed! Poor Eleanor, in those damp, overgrown gardens, with the high walls all round, and the tops of the trees above the walls. How lonely she'll be."

"Lonely! I shall come home to dinner every day."

"Yes, at seven o'clock; and from breakfast-time till seven poor Nell must amuse herself in the best way she can. But I'm not going to grumble; I'm only too happy to think she will be near me."

Mr. Monckton stood by the garden-gate — that gate near which he had so often loitered with Eleanor — listening with no very great satisfaction to his ward's frivolous prattle. His young wife would feel unhappy in the dulness of her new life, perhaps. If that were to be so, it would be proof positive that she did not love him. He could never have felt dull or lonely in her society, though Tolldale had been some grim and isolated habitation in the middle of an African desert.

"So you think she will be dull, Laura?" he said, rather despondently.

"Why *of course* she will," answered the young lady; "but now don't think me inquisitive, please," she added, in a very insinuating tone, "but I do so much want you to tell me something."

"You want me to tell you what?" asked the lawyer, rather sharply.

Laura linked her hand through his arm, and raising herself on tip-toe, so as to bring her rosy lips within easier reach of his ear, whispered archly,

"Does she *really* love you? Was it *really* a love-match?"

Gilbert Monckton started as violently as if that infantine whisper had been the envenomed hiss of a snake.

"What do you mean, child?" he said, turning sharply upon his ward; "of course Eleanor and I married because we loved each other? Why else should we have married?"

"No, to be sure. Girls marry for money sometimes. I heard Mrs. Darrell say that one of the Penwoods, of Windsor, married a horrid, old rich city man for the sake of his money. But I don't think Eleanor would do that sort of thing. Only it seems so funny that she should have been in love with you all the time."

"All what time?"

"Why all the time she and I were together. How could she help talking of you, I wonder?"

The lawyer bit his lip.

"She never talked of me, then?" he said, with a feeble attempt to make his tone careless.

"Oh, yes, she spoke of you sometimes, of course; but not in that way."

"Not in what way? When will you learn to express yourself clearly, Miss Mason? Are you going to be a child all your life?"

Gilbert Monckton's ward looked up at him with a half comic look of terror. He was not accustomed to speak so sharply to her.

"Don't be angry, please," she said, "I know I don't always express myself clearly. I dare say it's because I used to get other girls to do my themes — they call

exercises in composition themes, you know — when I was at school. I mean that Eleanor didn't talk of you as if she was in love with you — not as I talk — not as I *should* talk of any one if I were in love with them," added the young lady, blushing very much as she corrected herself.

Miss Mason had only one idea of the outer evidences of the master-passion. A secret or unrequited affection which did not make itself known by copious quotations of Percy Shelley and Letitia Landon, was in her mind a very common-place affair.

Mr. Monckton shrugged his shoulders.

"Who set you up as a judge of how a woman should speak of a man she loves?" he said sharply. "My wife has too much modesty to advertise her affections for any man. By-the-by, Miss Mason, would you like to come and live at Tolldale?"

Laura looked at her guardian with unmitigated surprise.

"Come and live at Tolldale!" she said; "I thought you didn't like me; I thought you despised me because I'm so frivolous and childish."

"Despise you, Laura," cried Gilbert Monckton, "not like you! My poor dear child, what a brute I must have been if I ever have given you such an impression as that. I am very fond of you, my dear," he added, gravely, laying his hand upon the girl's head as he spoke, and looking down at her with sorrowful tenderness. "I am very much attached to you, my poor dear child. If I ever seem vexed with your girlish frivolity, it is only because I am anxious about your future. I am very, very anxious about your future."

"But why are you so anxious?"

"Because your mother was childish and light-hearted like you, Laura, and her life was not a happy one."

"My poor mother. Ah, how I wish you would tell me about her."

Laura Mason looked very serious as she said this. Her hands were folded round the lawyer's arm, her bright blue eyes seemed to grow of a more sombre colour as she looked earnestly upward to his grave face.

"Not now, my dear; some day, some day, perhaps, we'll talk about all that. But not now. You haven't answered my question, Laura. Would you like to live at Tolldale?"

The young lady blushed crimson and dropped her eyelids.

"I should dearly like to live with Eleanor," she said. "But —"

"But what?"

"I don't think it would be quite right to leave Mrs. Darrell, would it? The money you pay her is of great use to her, you know; I have heard her say she could scarcely get on without it, especially now that Launcelot — now that Mr. Darrell has come home."

The blushes deepened as Laura Mason said this.

The lawyer watched those deepening blushes with considerable uneasiness. "She is in love with this dark-eyed young Apollo," he thought.

"You are very scrupulous about Mrs. Darrell and her convenience, Laura," he said. "I should have fancied you would have been delighted to live with

your old friend and companion. You'll come to-morrow to spend the day with Eleanor, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes: if you please."

"I'll send the carriage for you, after it has taken me to Slough. Good-bye."

Mr. Monckton rode slowly homewards. His interview with Laura had not been altogether agreeable to him. The girl's surprise at his marriage with Eleanor had irritated and disturbed him. It seemed like a protest against the twenty years that divided his age from that of his young wife. There was something abnormal and exceptionable in the marriage, it seemed, then; and the people who had congratulated him and wished him well, were so many bland and conventional hypocrites, who no doubt laughed in their sleeves at his folly.

The lawyer rode back to Tolldale Priory with a moody and overclouded brow.

"That girl is in love with Launcelot Darrell," he thought. "She betrayed her secret in her childish transparency. The young man must be wonderfully attractive, since people fall in love with him in this manner. I don't like him; I don't believe in him; I should not like Laura to be his wife."

Yet in the next moment Mr. Monckton reflected that, after all, a marriage between his ward and Launcelot might not be altogether unadvisable. The young man was clever and gentlemanly. He came of a good stock, and had at least brilliant expectations. He might marry Laura and go to Italy, where he could devote a few years to the cultivation of his art.

"If the poor child is really very much in love with him, and he returns her affection, it would be cruel to

come between them with any prudential tyranny," thought Mr. Monckton. "The young man seems really anxious to achieve success as an artist, and if he is to do so he ought certainly to study abroad."

The lawyer's mind dwelt upon this latter point throughout the remainder of his ride, and when he crossed the stone-paved hall where the cavalier's boots and saddles hung in the mysterious coloured light that stole through the emblazoned windows, he had almost come to the determination that Laura Mason and Launcelot Darrell ought to be married forthwith. He found his wife sitting in one of the windows of the library, with her hands lying idle in her lap, and her eyes fixed upon the garden before her. She started as he entered the room, and looked up at him with a bright eagerness in her face.

"You have been to Hazlewood?" she said.

"Yes, I have just come from there."

"And you have seen —?"

She stopped suddenly. Launcelot Darrell's name had risen to her lips, but she checked herself before uttering it, lest she should betray her eager interest in him. She had no fear of that interest being misconstrued; no idea of such a possibility had ever entered her head. She only feared that some chance look or word might betray her vengeful hatred of the young man.

"You saw Laura — and — and Mrs. Darrell, I suppose?" she said.

"Yes, I saw Laura and Mrs. Darrell," answered Gilbert Monckton, watching his wife's face. He had perceived the hesitation with which she had asked this question. He saw now that she was disappointed in his reply.

Eleanor was incapable of dissimulation, and her disappointment betrayed itself in her face. She had expected to hear something of Launcelot Darrell, something which would have at least given her an excuse for questioning her husband about him.

"You did not see Mr. Darrell, then?" she said, after a pause, during which Mr. Monckton had placed himself opposite to her in the open window. The afternoon sunshine fell full upon Eleanor's face; lighting up every change of expression; revealing every varying shade of thought that betrayed itself unconsciously in a countenance whose mobility was one of its greatest charms.

"No, Mr. Darrell was in his painting-room; I did not see him."

There was a pause. Eleanor was silent, scarcely knowing how to fashion any question that might lead to her gaining some information about the man whose secrets she had set herself to unravel.

"Do you know, Eleanor," said the lawyer after this pause, during which he had kept close watch upon his wife's face, "I think I have discovered a secret that concerns Launcelot Darrell."

"A secret?"

Sudden blushes lit up Eleanor Monckton's cheeks like a flaming fire.

"A secret!" she repeated. "You have found out a secret!"

"Yes, I believe that my ward, Laura Mason, has fallen in love with the young man."

Eleanor's face changed. Her feverish eagerness gave place to a look of indifference.

"Is that all?" she said.

She had no very great belief in the intensity of Miss Mason's feelings. The girl's sentimental talk and demonstrative admiration had to her mind something spurious in their nature; Mrs. Monckton was ready to love Laura very dearly when the business of her life should be done, and she could have time to love anybody, but in the meantime she gave herself no uneasiness about Miss Mason's romantic passion for the young painter.

"Laura is as inconstant as the wind," she thought. "She will hate Launcelot Darrell when I tell her how base he is."

But what was Eleanor's surprise when Mr. Monckton said, very quietly,

"If the girl is really attached to this young man, and he returns her affection — she is so pretty and fascinating, that I should think he could scarcely help being in love with her — I don't see why the match should not take place."

Eleanor looked up suddenly.

"Oh, no, no, no," she cried; "you would never let Laura marry Launcelot Darrell."

"And why not, Mrs. Monckton?"

The insidious imp which the lawyer had made his bosom companion of late, at this moment transformed itself into a raging demon, and gnawed ravenously at the vitals of its master.

"Why shouldn't Laura marry Launcelot Darrell?"

"Because you have a bad opinion of him. What did you say to me by the garden-gate at Hazlewood, when Mr. Darrell first came home? You said he was selfish, shallow, frivolous; false, perhaps. You said there was a secret in his life."

"I thought so then."

"And have you ceased to think so now?"

"I don't know. I may have been prejudiced against the young man," answered Mr. Monckton doubtfully.

"I don't think you were," Eleanor said; "I don't think he is a good man. Pray, pray don't let Laura marry him."

She clasped her hands in her eagerness, as she looked up in her husband's face.

Gilbert Monckton's brow darkened.

"What does it matter to you?" he asked.

Eleanor looked surprised at the almost angry abruptness of her husband's manner.

"It matters a great deal to me," she said. "I should be very sorry if Laura were to make an unhappy marriage."

"But must her marriage with Launcelot Darrell be necessarily unhappy?"

"Yes; because he is a bad man."

"What right have you to say that, unless you have some special reason for thinking it?"

"I have a special reason."

"What reason?"

"I cannot tell you — now."

The ravenous demon's tooth grew sharper than usual when Eleanor said this.

"Mrs. Monckton," the lawyer said, sternly, "I am afraid that there can be very little happiness in store for you and me if you begin your married life by keeping secrets from your husband."

Gilbert Monckton was too proud to say more than this. A dull despair was creeping into his breast, a sick loathing of himself and of his folly. Every one

of those twenty years which made him his young wife's senior rose up against him, and gibed, and twitted him.

What right had he to marry a young wife, and believe that she could love him? What justification could he find for his own folly in taking this girl from poverty and obscurity, and then expecting that she should feel any warmer sentiment than some feeble gratitude to him for having given her an advantageous bargain? He had given her a handsome house and attentive servants, carriages and horses, prosperity and independence, in exchange for her bright youth and beauty, and he was angry with her because she did not love him.

Looking back at that interview in the Pilasters — every circumstance of which was very clear to him now, by the aid of a pair of spectacles lent him by the jealous demon his familiar — Mr. Monckton remembered that no confession of love had dropped from Eleanor's lips. She had consented to become his wife, nothing more. She had, no doubt — in those moments of maidenly hesitation, during which he had waited so breathlessly — deliberately weighed and carefully balanced the advantages that were to be won from the sacrifice demanded of her.

Of course the perpetual brooding upon such fancies as these very much tended to make Gilbert Monckton an agreeable and lively companion for an impulsive girl. There is something remarkable in the persistency with which the sufferer from that terrible disease called jealousy strives to aggravate the causes of his torture.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.



of those twenty years which made him his young wife's senior rose up against him, and gibed, and twitted him.

What right had he to marry a young wife, and believe that she could love him? What justification could he find for his own folly in taking this girl from poverty and obscurity, and then expecting that she should feel any warmer sentiment than some feeble gratitude to him for having given her an advantageous bargain? He had given her a handsome house and attentive servants, carriages and horses, prosperity and independence, in exchange for her bright youth and beauty, and he was angry with her because she did not love him.

Looking back at that interview in the Pilasters — every circumstance of which was very clear to him now, by the aid of a pair of spectacles lent him by the jealous demon his familiar — Mr. Monckton remembered that no confession of love had dropped from Eleanor's lips. She had consented to become his wife, nothing more. She had, no doubt — in those moments of maidenly hesitation, during which he had waited so breathlessly — deliberately weighed and carefully balanced the advantages that were to be won from the sacrifice demanded of her.

Of course the perpetual brooding upon such fancies as these very much tended to make Gilbert Monckton an agreeable and lively companion for an impulsive girl. There is something remarkable in the persistency with which the sufferer from that terrible disease called jealousy strives to aggravate the causes of his torture.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth

Eleanor's victory

Bd.: 1

Leipzig (1863)

P.o.angl. 37 s-5/6

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10744941-1